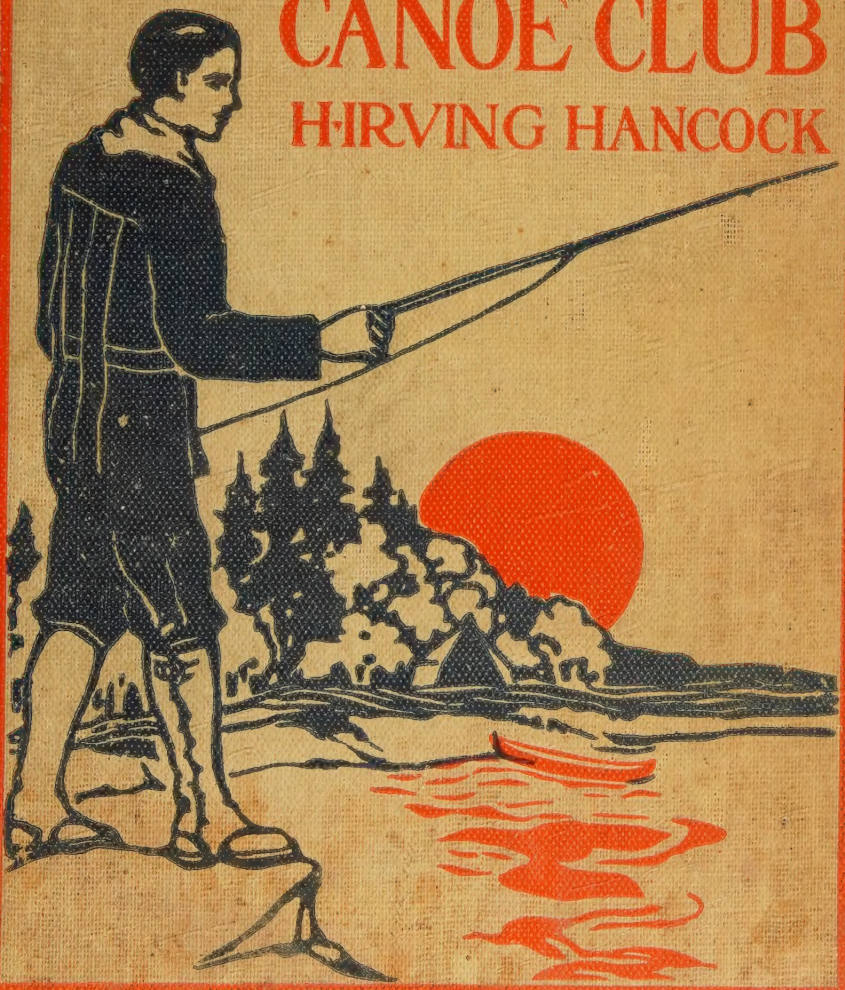
The HIGH SCHOOL BOYS' CANOE CLUB

HIRVING HANCOCK



THE HIGH SCHOOL BOYS VACATION SERIES

Ralph Bennett

1914.

Merry Xmas

To Ralph

from

Aunt May

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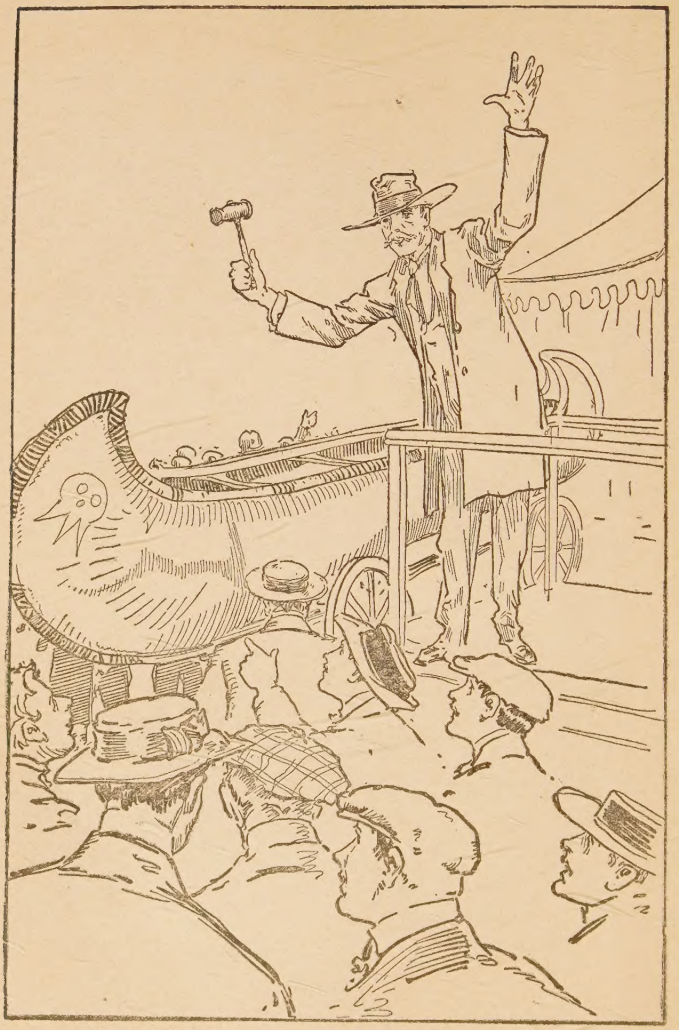

"Gaze Upon It, Gentlemen!"

Frontispiece.

The High School Boys Canoe Club

OR

Dick & Co.'s Rivals on Lake Pleasant

By

H. IRVING HANCOCK

Author of The Grammar School Boys Series, The High School Boys Series, The West Point Series, The Annapolis Series, The Young Engineers Series, The Motor Boat Club Series, The Boys of the Army Series, The Square Dollar Boys Series, etc.

Illustrated

P H I L A D E L P H I A
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The High School Boys Canoe Club

CHAPTER I

THE "SPLENDID" WAR CANOE

"IT'S the wreck of one of the grandest enterprises ever conceived by the human mind!" complained Colonel W. P. Grundy, in a voice broken with emotion.

A group of small boys grinned, though they offered no audible comment.

"Such defeats often—usually, in fact—come to those who try to educate the masses and bring popular intelligence to a higher level," was the colonel's declaration, as he wiped away a real or imaginary tear.

On a nearby lot stood a large show tent, so grayed and frayed, so altogether dingy as to suggest that it had seen some summers of service ere it became briefly the property of Colonel Grundy.

Near the entrance to the tent a temporary platform had been built of the board seats taken from the interior of the tent.

Near the platform stood a grim-visaged deputy sheriff, conversing with an auctioneer on whose face the grin had become chronic.

Some distance from the tent stood a group of perhaps forty men of the town of Gridley.

"The whole outfit of junk won't bring five hundred dollars," predicted one of these men. "How much did you say the judgments total?"

"Seventeen thousand four hundred dollars," replied another. "But the man who attached the show has a claim for only six hundred and forty dollars, so he may get most of his money."

Here the auctioneer stopped talking with the deputy sheriff long enough to go over to the platform, pick up a bell and ring it vigorously. A few more stragglers came up, most of them boys without any money in their pockets.

Off at one side of the lot six boys stood by themselves, talking in low tones, casting frequent, earnest glances toward the platform.

These youngsters were Dick Prescott, Dave Darrin, Greg Holmes, Tom Reade, Dan Dalzell and Harry Hazelton. Collectively they were known in the boydom of Gridley as Dick & Co.

Our readers are already familiar with every one of these lads, having first been introduced to them in the "Grammar School Boys Series," with its four volumes, "The Grammar School Boys of Gridley," "The Grammar

School Boys Snowbound," "The Grammar School Boys in the Woods" and "The Grammar School Boys in Summer Athletics." The varied and stirring exploits of Dick & Co., as told in these books, stamped the six chums as American boys of the best sort.

Then, in "The High School Freshmen," the first volume of the "High School Boys Series," our readers went further into the history of Dick & Co., and saw how even freshmen may impress their personalities on the life and sports of a high school. The pranks, the fights, the victories and achievements of that first year in high school had done much to shape the characters and mould the minds of all six of our boys.

The present narrative deals with all that happened in the vacation after Dick Prescott and his friends had finished their freshman year. The summer now lay before them for whatever might come to them in the way of work and pleasure. Though none of the six yet knew it, the summer was destined to bring to them the fullest measure of wonder and excitement.

And now let us get back to Dick & Co., that we may see just what befell them.

"Pshaw! There comes Fred Ripley," exclaimed Harry Hazelton.

"And he probably has a few ten dollar bills in his pockets," remarked Greg Holmes, rather enviously. "He will buy something."

Fred Ripley, as readers of "The High School Freshmen" remember, was the son of a wealthy local lawyer, and a bitter enemy to Dick Prescott and his friends.

"Fred just came here to buy something and then look at us with his superior smile," grunted Hazelton. "What do you say if we all walk away before the bidding begins?"

"Then Rip would grin," returned Tom Reade. "He'd know just why we went away. I came here to see what's going to happen, and I won't be chased away from here by Fred Ripley."

"Let's see if Fred can have any real fun with us," proposed Dick, with a quiet smile.

"He can have fun enough with us, if he guesses why we are really here," Dave Darrin uttered resentfully. "Ripley seems to think that money is made and supplied to him just in order that he may rub gall and wormwood into those whom he doesn't like!"

Fred kept well away from Dick & Co., though the six boys saw that he occasionally sent a covert look in their direction.

"Time to begin," said the deputy sheriff, after glancing at his watch.

Up to the platform jumped the auctioneer, bell in hand. Holding it with both hands he again rang vigorously for a full minute. The net result was to bring one shabby-looking man, two grammar school boys without a cent of money, and three children of not over four years of age into the lot.

"Ladies and gentlemen," began the auctioneer, in his glib tones, "we are presenting to-day a most unusual opportunity. Prizes will be distributed to many enterprising people of Gridley, though these prizes are all so valuable that I trust none of them will go for the traditional 'song.' It is seldom, indeed, in any community, however favored it may be in general, that such a diversified lot of excellent things is put under the hammer for purchase by discriminating buyers! As you all know, Colonel W. P. Grundy's Great & Colossal Indian Exposition & Aboriginal Life Delineations has met with one of the too-common disasters of the road. This great show enterprise must now be sold out in its entirety."

After an impressive pause, the silence was broken by a sob. Those in the crowd who were curious enough to turn, beheld the colonel with a handkerchief to his eyes, his shoulders heaving. Somehow the colonel's noisy grief failed to excite the sympathy of those assembled. It

was suspected that the wrecked showman was playing for sympathy.

"Such a wealth of treasures is here offered," continued the auctioneer, "that for the first time in my career I confess myself unable to decide which article or lot to lay before you first."

"You said that last week at Templeton," laughed a man in the crowd. "Go on!"

Whereupon the auctioneer once more addressed his hearers in a burst of vocal fireworks.

"I wonder what Prescott and his mucker friends are here to bid on?" Fred Ripley was asking himself. "Whatever it is, if it's nothing that I want for myself I'll bid it up as high against them as I can. For, of course, they've pooled their funds for whatever they want to get. They can't put in more than a quarter apiece, so a dollar and a half is all I have to beat. I'll wager they already suspect that I'm here just to make things come higher for them. I hope they do suspect!"

It was just after the Fourth of July. The summer sun shone fiercely down upon the assemblage.

"Perhaps, first of all," announced the auctioneer, after pausing to take breath, "it will be the proper thing to do to offer the tent it-

self. At this point, however, I will say that the foreclosing creditor of the show himself bids two hundred dollars on the tent. No bid, unless it be more than two hundred dollars, can be accepted. Come, now, friends, here is a fine opportunity for a shrewd business man. One need not be a showman, or have any personal need of a tent, in order to become a bidder. Whoever buys this tent to-day will be able to realize handsomely on his investment by selling this big-top tent in turn to some showman in need of a tent. Who will start the bidding at three hundred dollars?"

No one started it. After the auctioneer had talked for five minutes without getting a "rise" out of any Gridley citizen, he mournfully declared the tent to be outside of the sale.

"Has anyone here any choice as to what he wants me to offer next?" questioned the salesman of the afternoon.

There was no response.

"Come, come, gentlemen!" rebuked the auctioneer. "Don't let the July sun bake your intellects, or the first cool day that comes along will find you all filled with unavailing regrets. Hasn't some one a choice as to what should be offered next?"

Still receiving no reply, he heaved a sigh, then added:

"I see that we shall have to start action in some way. Therefore we'll bring out something that is action personified, with grace mingled. Bring out the ponies. Gentlemen, I am now going to offer you your choice of eight of the handsomest ponies you ever——"

"But there are forty ponies and thirty-two good wagon horses," piped up a business man in the audience.

"There were," corrected the auctioneer, mournfully. "But most of the live stock was rented. Colonel Grundy had hoped to buy the stock gradually out of the receipts of the show. All that he owned in the way of live stock consisted of eight ponies. And here they come! Beauties, aren't they?"

Despite the heat of the day it was as though a frost had settled down over the scene. Many of the men present were butchers, grocers or others who had hoped to pick up cheap horses to be used in their business.

"Ponies are no good in this town," cried one man. "Lead 'em away. Come on, neighbors."

"Wait, wait!" urged the auctioneer. "There are some bargains yet to come that will interest you all. Since we have the ponies on the spot let us begin to run them off. It will teach you all how to bid quickly when you see wonderful bargains bought up under your noses!"

The bidding, however, was lax at first. A stable boy mounted one of the little animals, riding about at reckless pace.

"Now, start the bidding!"

After five minutes talking an opening bid of five dollars for the pony had been made and this had been advanced to seven.

With all the zeal at his command the auctioneer drove the bidding along. It reached fourteen dollars, and there stopped. At last the pony was knocked down to a man who thought he could use the animal in a very light delivery wagon.

"Now, gentlemen, wake up!" begged the auctioneer. "Let us have some bidding worthy of the fair name of Gridley for good judgment in business matters. Lead the roan pony forth."

Undoubtedly the first pony had been a fair bargain at fourteen dollars. The bidding on the second animal began at ten dollars, going quickly to eighteen. From that point the offers traveled slowly until twenty-six dollars had been named. At this price the pony was sold.

From that time on the ponies were "knocked down" rather briskly, though the highest-priced one of the first seven brought only thirty-one dollars.

Now came the eighth.

"You see what this animal is for yourselves,

gentlemen," declared the auctioneer. "We don't need to have this sleek little animal's paces shown. We are in a hurry to get through. Who opens with twenty dollars?"

"He is a handsome little animal, isn't he?" exclaimed Dick Prescott, crowding forward and gazing at the pony with glistening eyes.

"I wish I had the money to buy him," whispered Dave Darrin.

"Maybe I couldn't use that kind of a cut-down horse!" glowed Tom Reade, while Harry and Dan looked on longingly.

"That's what the muckers are here after!" thought Fred Ripley, who had been watching them closely. "Now, no matter how much money they may think they have, I'll show them how easy it is for a fellow of my financial standing to step in and get the chestnut pony away from them!"

"Who starts the bidding with twenty dollars?" demanded the auctioneer.

"Ten," finally responded a man in the crowd.

"Thank you. But, gentlemen, ten dollars is a shame for a beautiful animal like this. Who makes it twenty? Start it right up now!"

Presently the bidding had reached sixteen dollars. Dick and his chums had crowded still closer to the pony, looking on with lively interest.

"Here's where I sting Prescott and his crew!" muttered Fred Ripley under his breath. Then, aloud, he called:

"Twenty!"

"Thank you," smiled the auctioneer, nodding in Ripley's direction. "Here is a young man of sound judgment and a good idea of money values, as his manner and his whole appearance testify."

"Someone hold Rip, or he'll burst," laughed Greg Holmes in Dick's ear.

But Fred thought the chums were conferring as to how far they could go with what means the six of them might have at hand.

"They will get going soon," thought Fred gleefully.

Just then Dick Prescott piped up:

"Twenty-two!"

"Twenty-two? Thank you," bowed the auctioneer. "Another young gentleman of the finest judgment. Who says twenty-five?"

"Twenty-three," offered Fred.

"Twenty-five," called Prescott promptly.

An instant after Dick had made this bid he felt heartily ashamed of himself. He hadn't intended to buy the pony, and didn't have the money. He had obeyed a sudden instinct to tease Fred Ripley, but now Dick wished he hadn't done it.

"Twenty-six!" called young Ripley.

The auctioneer looked at Prescott, but the latter, already abashed at his own conduct, made no further offer.

"Twenty-eight!" called a man in the crowd, who knew that the wealthy lawyer's son usually got whatever he wanted very badly. This new bidder thought he saw a chance to get the pony, then later to force Fred to pay a still higher price for the animal.

"Thirty!" called Ripley, with a sidelong glance at Dick & Co.

"Did I hear you offer thirty-five?" queried the auctioneer, singling out Dick Prescott.

But Dick remained mute. However, in the next instant Greg Holmes, ere Prescott could stop him, blurted out with:

"Thirty-two!"

"Thirty-four!" called Ripley briskly.

Greg opened his mouth, but Dick nudged him.

"Don't bid, Greg. You'd feel cheap if you had to take the pony and couldn't produce the money," Dick admonished him.

"Thirty-five!" called the man who had raised the bidding before.

"Thirty-six," from Ripley.

"Thirty-eight!" called the man.

"Thirty-nine!" offered Fred, though he was beginning to perspire freely.

"Forty!" promptly offered the man.

"Forty-one!" said Fred.

And there it hung. After three minutes more of hard work on the auctioneer's part the pony went to Ripley at forty-one dollars.

"I don't know what my father will say to me for this," groaned the lawyer's son. "But, anyway, Prescott and his crew didn't get the chestnut pony, and this is the last piece of live stock, so there's none left for them."

He cast a triumphant look in the direction of those whom he termed "the raucker boys."

"Rip was bidding to keep us from getting a look-in!" whispered Tom Reade gleefully.

"That was what I thought," nodded Dick Prescott. "That was why I threw in a couple of bids—just to make him pay for his meanness. But I'm sorry I did it."

"Step up and pay your money!" ordered the auctioneer. "Don't keep us waiting all day."

"Won't a deposit do?" demanded Fred, coming forward.

"Yes; we'll take fifteen dollars, and hold your purchase until one hour after the sale closes," replied the auctioneer. "Then, if you don't come along fast with the remainder, your deposit will be forfeited."

"I'll raise the money all right," drawled Ripley, with an important air, as he passed up

three five dollar bills. "Give me a receipt for this, please."

"You've money enough there to pay it all," said the auctioneer.

"Yes; but I may bid on something else," Fred replied.

"Good luck to you," laughed the auctioneer.

Presently along came a miscellaneous lot of the weapons that had been used by cowboys and Indians connected with the show. The auctioneer tried to close these out in one lot, but there were no bids.

Several of the younger men did brisk, but not high bidding for the rifles. These were disposed of.

Then tomahawks were offered for sale, singly. The first ones offered went at an average of twenty-five cents each. At last Dan Dalzell secured one for a nickel, paid his money and proudly tucked his purchase under his arm.

"Bring out the grand war canoe!" called the auctioneer at last.

Now every drop of blood in Dick Prescott's body tingled. His chums, too, were equally aroused. It was this that they had hope of securing—if it went off at a price next to nothing!

So intensely interested were the six young high school athletes in the proceedings now

that each one steeled himself to prevent betraying the fact. All were aware that Fred Ripley's malicious eyes were watching them. If he suspected that they wanted the canoe he could put the bidding up to a figure that would make their wishes impossible of fulfillment.

Dick yawned. He looked intensely bored.

"Come along," proposed Dave in an audible voice. "There's nothing here we can get."

"Yes; it's getting tedious," hinted Tom Reade.

Dalzell and Hazelton also appeared to lose all interest in the auction.

"I was in hopes they'd want that canoe," muttered Fred Ripley, feeling as though he had been cheated out of a great pleasure. "As it happens I know all about that canoe. Wow! Wouldn't they groan if they put up all their money for the canoe—*and then found out!*"

Just then the canoe was brought out. It was bolstered up on a long truck, drawn by a pair of horses. Twenty-eight feet long, slender and of graceful lines, this canoe, with its oiled birch bark glistening in the sun, was a thing of beauty. It was one of the genuine articles that the show had carried—of real Indian model and workmanship.

"Gaze upon it, gentlemen!" cried the auctioneer enthusiastically. "Did you ever see the

like of this grand war canoe? History in every line of it! Picture to yourselves the bygone days in which such a canoe, filled with painted braves, stole along in the shadows fringing the bank of some noble stream. Portray to your own minds such a marauding band stealing down stream upon some settlement, there to fall upon our hardy pioneers and put them to the death!"

"I'm glad I'm living now, instead of in those days," called a man from the crowd, raising a laugh.

"Gentlemen, before you are through," suggested the auctioneer, "one of you will be the proud and happy possessor of this magnificent war canoe. It is a priceless gem, especially when considered in the light of good old American history. Now, who will start the bidding? Who will say, clearly and distinctly, thirty dollars?"

"We're not brave enough in these days!" called a voice from the crowd.

"That's right, friends—have fun with me," retorted the perspiring auctioneer. "But don't let this valuable, beautiful trophy get away from you."

Yet, though the auctioneer labored for a full five minutes he couldn't raise a bid.

"Take it away! Take it back!" ordered the

auctioneer wearily. "I was in hopes it would appeal to the artistic sense of this town, but it doesn't! Take it away."

"If no one else wants it," drawled Dick Prescott, "I'll offer two dollars."

"Thank you for good intentions, anyway," replied the salesman on the platform. "Two dollars I'm bid. Who says ten? Now, do wake up, friends!"

But the bidding lagged.

"This beautiful war canoe!" cried the auctioneer desperately. "It was the pride of the show. A real Indian canoe, equipped with gunwale seats and six Indian paddles. And only two dollars offered. Gentlemen, do I hear three? No! Last call! It's pitiful—two dollars!"

Dick Prescott and all his friends were now in the seventh heaven of prospective delight. It seemed unreal, that they could get this treasure for any such sum.

"If I must do it, I must," groaned the auctioneer. "Two I'm offered. Does anyone say more. Make it four! No? Make it three! No? Last call! Going, going——"

In another instant the big war canoe would have been knocked down to young Prescott at two dollars. Dick was "all on edge," though he strove to conceal the fact.

"At two dollars, then!" groaned the auctioneer. "Two dollars! All right, then. Going, going——"

Just then the word "gone" would have been uttered, and the canoe gone to Dick & Co.

"Three dollars!" called Fred Ripley.

There was a pause, while the auctioneer exhorted the crowd to wake up.

"Four," said young Prescott, at last, but he spoke with pretended indifference.

"Five," chimed in a man who now seemed to take an interest. The bidding now went up slowly, a dollar at a time, with these three bidders, until twelve dollars was reached. Then the man dropped out. Dick was outwardly calm, though his chums shivered, for they knew that their combined capital did not reach the amount now being offered.

"I'm afraid that canoe is going to Dick's head," whispered Harry Hazelton anxiously to Tom Reade.

"Let him alone," retorted Tom in a low voice. "It's one of Dick Prescott's good points that he generally knows what he's doing."

"But we have only——"

"Never mind if we're worth a million, or only a single dollar," interrupted Reade impatiently. "Watch the battle between our leader and Rip, the Mean!"

Now the bidding became slower, fifty cents at a time being offered, bids coming only when the auctioneer threatened to "knock down."

"I don't want to get this confounded canoe fastened onto me," grumbled Fred Ripley to himself. "I want to stick Prescott and his crowd for all I can, but I must look out that I don't get stung. I know better than to want that canoe, no matter how good it *looks!*"

"Sixteen," said Dick at last, feeling more desperate inwardly than his face showed.

"Sixteen-fifty," from Ripley.

"Seventeen," offered Dick, after a pause.

"Seventeen-fifty," announced Fred, after another long halt.

"Eighteen!" followed up young Prescott. He was in a cold perspiration now, lest the fight be forced too far.

To his astonishment, Fred Ripley, an ugly sneer on his face, turned his back on the bidding.

"Are you through, gentlemen?" demanded the auctioneer, after a keen look in the direction of the lawyer's son.

"I am," Ripley growled over his shoulder.

"I am offered eighteen! Eighteen! Eighteen! Who says nineteen? Make it eighteen-fifty! Who says eighteen-fifty? Eighteen and a quarter! Are you through, gentlemen? Then—

going, going—gone! Sold to Master Prescott at eighteen dollars. Young man, I congratulate you. Walk right up and pay your money! All, or a deposit?"

Dick, who had been collecting loose change from his chums, now came forward.

"I'll pay a deposit of seven dollars," he announced.

"Hand it here, then. Seven dollars; thank you. Here's your receipt. Now, remember, Prescott, you have until the end of one hour after the sale closes. Then, if you're not here with the other eleven dollars, you must expect to forfeit this deposit."

"I know," Dick nodded.

Then he hurried off to his chums.

"Come along," he said, with desperate energy, as he led them away from the field. On the sidewalk he halted.

"We've got it, fellows!" he exulted. "We've got it! Hooray!"

"Yes; we've got it, if we've got eleven dollars more—which we haven't," Greg remarked.

"We've eleven dollars more to raise," Prescott went on hurriedly. "Roughly, that's two dollars apiece. We must hustle, too."

"No hustle for mine," yawned Dan Dalzell. "I'll just step down to my bank and get the money. Will two dollars be enough, Dick?"

"Stop that talk," ordered Dave Darrin, geting a grip on Dan's shirt collar. "If you don't, I'll thrash you! Dick has a scheme. Out with it, old chap!"

"The scheme is simple enough," said Prescott hurriedly. "We must each get two dollars, and get it like lightning. That will come to a dollar over the amount we need, but we shall need the extra dollar, anyway. So hustle! Borrow the money from anyone who'll let you have it. Offer to work the money out at any time—any old kind of work. The only point is to come running back with the money. Get it in any honest way that you can, and don't one of you dare to fail, or we'll lose our deposit money and our canoe. Start!"

Nor did Prescott lose any time himself, but raced down the street, turned into Main Street and ran on until he came to the little cross street on which stood the bookstore conducted by his father and mother.

"Mercy, Dick! What makes you run so?" asked Mrs. Prescott. Dick was rejoicing to discover that there was, at this moment, no customer in the store.

"Mother," replied her son, "I want to borrow three dollars this minute. I'll be responsible for it—I'll pay it back. Please let me have it—in a hurry!"

Then, briefly, he poured out the story. Mrs. Prescott's hand had already traveled toward the cash register.

"We're very short of money just now, my boy. Try to earn this and pay it back quickly. You know, trade is slow in the summer time, and we have several bills to meet."

"Yes, I'll pay it back, mother, at the first chance—and I'll make the chance—somehow," promised young Prescott. "Thank you."

The money in his hand, Dick raced back to the lot where the show tent still stood.

He was back before any of the others and waited impatiently. Dave Darrin came up ten minutes later.

"Did you get it?" asked Dick anxiously.

"Yes," replied Dave laconically, pushing two one dollar bills into Dick's hand.

One by one the other boys arrived. Each had managed to round up his part of the assessment.

With thirteen dollars in his hand, Dick went up to the auctioneer's clerk.

"I am ready to pay the other eleven dollars on the canoe," Prescott announced, speaking as calmly as possible.

"All right," agreed the clerk. "But you'll have to find some man you can trust to take the bill of sale. We can't pass title to a minor."

"Why didn't you tell me that before?" Dick demanded.

"That's all right. It wasn't necessary before, but it is now. Just find some man who will treat you all right and give you the canoe. Then we'll take the money and make out the bill of sale to him."

Fred Ripley now sauntered up, offering his money. He was given the same directions for finding a man to whom title could pass.

Dick looked about him. Then across the lot, and over on the further side of the street he saw his father.

Dick returned quickly to the lot with Mr. Prescott, explaining the situation. The bookseller listened gravely, but offered no objections. He stepped over, paid the money for Dick, then said:

"I must be going. Turn the canoe over to my son."

"Yes, sir," replied the auctioneer's clerk. "Men, haul out the truck that has the canoe on it!"

Mr. Prescott had already walked away. Dick and his chums greeted the coming of truck and canoe with a wild whoop. Then they piled up on the truck to inspect their treasure.

Fred Ripley, returning with Mr. Dodge, a local banker, saw the six youngsters climbing

up to look at their purchase. A broad, malicious grin appeared on Ripley's face.

"Sold! sold!" gasped Dave Darrin. Then his face flushed with anger.

For the canoe, which looked well enough on exhibition, proved to have three bad holes in her hull, which had been carefully concealed by the manner in which the craft had been propped up on the truck.

The great war canoe looked worthless—certain to sink in less than sixty seconds if launched!

CHAPTER II

"RIP" TRIES OUT HIS BARGAIN

HAD a meaner trick ever been played on boys with whom it was so hard to raise money?

"Ha, ha, ha!" chuckled Fred Ripley, so loudly that the dismayed, angry boys could not fail to hear him.

"You sneak! You knew it all the time!" flared Dave Darrin, gazing down in disgust at the lawyer's son.

"Maybe I did know," Fred admitted, yet speaking to Mr. Dodge. "You see, one of my father's clerks served the papers which attached the show."

There was no help for Dick & Co. They had parted with their money and their "property" had been turned over to them.

It is an ancient principle of law that the buyer must beware. The auctioneer had been most careful not to represent the canoe as being fit for service. He had offered it as an historical curiosity!

Dick & Co. looked at the canoe anxiously.

"What shall we do with it?" asked Dave Darrin moodily.

"Make a bonfire of it?" asked Danny Grin.

"Might as well," Greg nodded.

"No, sir!" Dick interrupted. "Tom, what do you say? You're one of the really handy boys. Can't this canoe be patched up, mended and put in commission?"

"It might be done," Tom answered slowly.

The other five stood regarding him with eager interest.

"But we'd have to get an Indian here to show us how to do it."

"Where are the Indians that were here with the show?" asked Harry Hazelton.

"They went away as soon as the show was attached," Dick answered. "Probably they're hundreds of miles from here now. They were only hired out to the show by their white manager, and they've gone to another job. Besides, they were only show Indians, and probably they've forgotten all they ever knew about canoe-building—if they ever did know anything."

"Then I don't see but that we're just as badly off as ever," sighed Greg. "We're out eighteen dollars and the fine canoe that we expected would provide us with so much fun."

"The paddles look all right, anyway," spoke up Harry Hazelton, lifting one out of the canoe and looking it over critically.

"Oh, yes, the paddles are all right, and the river is close at hand," spoke Dave Darrin vengefully. "All we need is a canoe that will float."

"If it were a cedar canoe we might patch it easily enough," Prescott declared. "But I've heard that there is so much 'science' to making or mending a birch bark canoe that an amateur always makes the job worse."

"Haw, haw, haw!" came boisterously from Fred Ripley. He and Mr. Dodge were now standing before the table of the auctioneer's clerk. Fred was paying down the remaining twenty-six dollars on the price he had bid for the handsome chestnut pony.

"Yes, you're laughing at us, you contemptible Rip!" scowled Dave, though he spoke under his breath. "You can afford to lose money, for you always know where to get more. You knew this canoe was worthless, and you deliberately bid it up on us—you scoundrel!"

"Shall we make Colonel Grundy a present of this canoe?" suggested Danny Grin dolefully.

"The poor old man hasn't money enough to get the canoe away from here, even if he wanted to," replied Dick, in a voice of sympathy.

"But how did the show folks manage to use this canoe?" asked Tom Reade.

"They didn't, except on a truck in a street

parade, I imagine," Dick replied. "And that must be how the holes came to be in the bottom. The sun got in its work on the bark and oil, and blistered the body of the canoe so that it broke or wore away in spots. Oh, dear!"

The sale was over, but a few odds and ends remained. Fred Ripley, having now paid the whole of his forty-one dollars through Mr. Dodge, ordered his handsome new purchase led out.

A man came out, holding the pony's halter. He walked slowly, the pony moving contentedly after him.

"A fine little animal!" glowed Fred, stroking the glossy coat.

"He—er—looks rather old, doesn't he?" ventured Mr. Dodge.

"Not so very old," Fred answered airily. "There is a lot of life and vim left in this little fellow. And he can show speed, too, or I'm all wrong."

Then Fred's eye roved toward the pile of stuff on which no one had bid.

"There's a good saddle," suggested Ripley.

"The real western kind," nodded the auctioneer.

It looked the part.

"I'll give you two dollars for the saddle," Fred offered.

"You'll pay ten if you get that saddle," replied the red-faced auctioneer.

"Put it up and let us see how the bids will run," proposed Ripley.

"The sale is closed. Anything that is sold now will go at private sale," retorted the auctioneer.

"Oh, come now!" protested Ripley. "I'd like to trade with you."

"You can, if you produce the price. At least, your friend can. I can't deal with you, for you're a minor."

Fred tried vainly to persuade the auctioneer to lower the price of the saddle, but finally concluded to pay ten dollars for it and two dollars for a bridle. A worn saddle cloth was "thrown in" for good measure. Ripley handed the money to the auctioneer's clerk.

"Saddle up," directed Fred, tossing a quarter to the man who held the pony's bridle.

Though flushed with his bargain, Fred was also feeling rather solemn. He had parted with nearly all of the sixty dollars his father had handed him that morning as his summer's spending money. He was beginning to wonder if his pony would really take the place of all the fun he had planned for his summer vacation.

"Here is your mount, sir," called the man

who had done the saddling. "Now, let's see what kind of a horseman you are."

"As good as you'll find around Gridley," declared Fred complacently.

Putting a foot into the left stirrup, he vaulted lightly to the animal's back.

"He has a treasure, and we're stung," muttered Dave Darrin in a low voice. "Those that have plenty of money and can afford to lose don't often lose!"

Before starting off Fred, glancing over at Dick & Co. standing dolefully on the truck, brayed insolently:

"Haw, haw, haw!"

Dave clenched his fists, but knew that he could do nothing without making himself ridiculous.

"Get up, Prince!" ordered young Ripley, bringing one hand smartly against the animal's flank.

"He's going to call his pony 'Prince,' " whispered Danny Grin.

"It looks like an appropriate name," nodded Dick wistfully.

For some reason the pony didn't seem inclined to start. Fred dug his heels against the animal's side and moved away at a walk.

"A-a-a-ah!" murmured a crowd of small boys enviously.

"Now, show a little speed, Prince," ordered Fred, digging his heels in hard.

The pony broke into a trot. Someone passed Ripley a switch, with which he dealt his animal a stinging blow. Away went pony and rider at a slow canter.

"Fine gait this little fellow has," exulted Fred, while cheers went up from the small boys.

Suddenly the animal slowed down to a walk. Fred applied two sharp cuts with the switch, again starting his mount. Fred turned and came cantering back toward the group, feeling mightily proud of himself.

Suddenly the pony stopped, trembling in every limb.

"Get off, young man!" called someone. "Your pony is going to fall!"

Fred got off, feeling rather peculiar. He wished that the six fellow high school boys over on the truck would move off.

Mr. Dodge hurried over to the young man, looking very much concerned.

"Fred," murmured the banker, "for all his fine looks I'm afraid there is something wrong with your pony."

"What is it?" asked Fred, looking, as he felt, vastly troubled.

At that moment an automobile stopped out in the road.

"Beg your pardon, Mr. Dodge," called the chauffeur, "but are you going to want me soon?"

"I want you at once," called back the banker, adding in a lower voice to Fred:

"Flannery, my new chauffeur, was a coachman for many years. He's a fine judge of horseflesh."

Flannery came up, an inquiring look on his face.

"I want you to look this pony over and tell me just what you think of him," directed the banker.

Flannery went over the pony's "lines" with the air of an expert, as, indeed, he was.

"Fine-looking little beast," said Flannery. "He has been well fed and groomed."

Then he looked into the pony's mouth, examining the teeth with great care.

"Used to be a nice animal once," decided Flannery, "but he was that a long time ago. He's about twenty-five or twenty-six years old."

"*What!*" exploded young Ripley, growing very red in the face.

"Thinking of buying him, sir?" asked the chauffeur respectfully."

"I've already bought him," confessed Fred ruefully.

Flannery whistled softly. Then he took the pony by the bridle, dragging him along over the ground at a trot, the crowd making way for him.

"Wind-broken," announced the ex-coachman, leading the trembling animal back. "Bad case, too."

"A veterinary can cure that," Fred declared, speaking more airily than his feelings warranted.

"Hm!" replied Flannery dryly. "You find the veterinary, Master Fred, and I'll show the gentleman how to make his fortune if he can cure wind-broken horses."

"Then what good is the pony?" demanded Fred in exasperataion.

"Well, the hide ought to fetch three dollars, and there are a good many pounds of soap fat in him," replied Flannery slowly.

"And is that all the good there is in this pony?" cried Ripley. He felt like screaming.

"It's all the good I can see in him, sir," replied Flannery.

"Then I won't take this pony," young Ripley declared, flushing hotly. "It's a downright swindle. Here, my man, hand my money back and take your old soap box."

"Not to-day," declared the auctioneer briefly. He and his clerk were now preparing to depart.

"You'd better!" warned Fred.

"I won't."

"Then I'll have you arrested."

"Try it."

"Run and get a policeman," Fred ordered, turning to a crowd of small boys.

"All right," smiled the auctioneer. "If you'll be quick about it I'll wait for your policeman."

But Mr. Dodge, who had shaken his head toward three boys who had shown signs of being willing to run for a policeman, now led young Ripley to one side.

"No use making any fuss about it, I'm afraid, Fred. You saw the pony when it was offered for sale, didn't you?"

"Yes."

"And you didn't ask to have him run? You didn't demand the privilege of trying him yourself?"

"No, sir."

"What representations did the auctioneer make about the pony?" pressed Mr. Dodge.

"Why, he said the pony was a fine-looking animal——"

"And that's no lie," responded Mr. Dodge gravely. "What else?"

"That's the only representation that I did make," broke in the auctioneer, who had

strolled slowly over to them. "I also said that the pony showed all of his good points."

"I'm afraid you'll have to swallow your loss, Fred," suggested the banker. "I'm sorry that I had even an innocent part in this trade."

"Trade?" screamed Fred, now losing all control of himself. "It wasn't a trade at all! It's piracy! It's highway robbery! It was a barefaced swindle, and this swindler——"

Fred glared at the auctioneer.

"Go slowly, young man," advised the salesman of the afternoon.

"You're a swindler, and a mean one, taking downright advantage of other folks," stormed young Ripley. "But you won't get away with this swindle. My father is a lawyer—the best lawyer in the place—and he'll give you good reason to shiver!"

"All right, young man. Send your father after me—if he'll take the case. But I'm going down to see him, anyway, for I must give him an accounting of the money taken in this afternoon. Come along, Edson," to his clerk.

Very red in the face, Fred Ripley stood with his fists clenched, trying to avoid the eyes of the many grinning men and boys gathered around him.

Dick & Co. had gotten down from the truck. They did not join in the fun-making at the

enemy's expense, though naturally they did not feel very sorry for young Ripley.

"Will you ride your pony home, sir?" asked the man who had done the saddling.

"No," said Fred shortly. He felt tempted to tell the man to lead the worthless animal away and shoot it. Then he changed his mind.

"Take this half dollar," he said, "and take the pony down and leave it in our stable."

For another thought had just occurred to Fred Ripley. If he kept a close mouth, and watched his chance, he hoped that he might yet be able to make some sort of "trade" with the pony as an asset.

CHAPTER III

BUYING FUEL FOR A BONFIRE?

"WELL, what are we going to do with our magnificent war canoe?" asked Greg Holmes dolefully. "Does the bonfire idea go?"

"It doesn't," Dick retorted. "Although we don't know anything about such a job, and though it is supposed to need a sure enough expert to do it, we're at least going to try the thing out and see if we can't make this canoe float, and carry us safely, at that!"

"We'd better decide how to get it away from here, anyway," proposed Tom Reade. "We haven't any lease of this lot."

Over near the road a group of men and boys were laughing heartily. It was at the lawyer's son that their mirth was directed. As for Dick & Co., the Gridley crowd felt only sympathy. The proceedings of the afternoon had but emphasized the old idea that at an auction sale one must either use great judgment or take his chances.

"Say," called Dick, "there goes the very man we ought to ask for advice. Harry, will you run over and ask Hiram Driggs to come here?"

Hazelton, nodding, hurried away at full speed.

"Hiram Driggs is an awfully high-priced man," sighed Tom Reade.

"Perhaps his mere advice won't come high," young Prescott answered. "If it does, we'll begin right by telling him that we have no money—that we've nothing in fact but a birch-bark white elephant on our hands."

Driggs came over promptly, his keen, shrewd eyes twinkling.

"So you boys have been buying away from my shop, and have been 'stung,' eh?" queried Driggs, a short, rather stout man of about forty.

"Robbed, I'd call it," replied Dave Darrin.

"Same thing, at a horse trade or an auction sale," hinted Hiram dryly, as he got up on the truck. "Let's have a look at your steam yacht."

For a few moments Driggs looked the canoe over in grim silence.

"Whew!" was the final comment.

"Pretty bad, isn't it?" Dick inquired.

"Well, for my part, I'd sooner buy a real wreck," Driggs announced. "This may be an auctioneer's idea of honor. What was his name?"

"The auctioneer's name? Caswell," Dick answered.

"I'll make a note of that name," said Driggs, drawing out notebook and pencil, "and keep away from any auction that has a man named Caswell on the quarter-deck. Now, boys, what do you want to know about this canoe that your eyes don't tell you?"

"About how much would it cost us to fix her?" asked Prescott.

"Thirty dollars—maybe thirty-two," said Driggs, after another casual look at the canoe.

"Let's announce the bonfire for to-night," urged Greg.

"We haven't any such sum of money, Mr. Driggs," Dick went on.

"Too bad, boys, for you'd probably have a lot of fun in this craft. If you want to sell it, maybe I could allow you four dollars for the craft as she stands."

"We'd hate to part with the canoe," Dick continued.

"I know, I know," remarked Driggs sympathetically. "It was wanting a boat badly when I was a boy that drove me into the boat business. But I didn't have to handle birch bark then, or my first craft would have sunk me. Say, boys, great joke how young Ripley got stung so badly, wasn't it?"

"I know about how he feels," remarked Dick.

"Yes, of course," smiled Driggs. "But you

boys are entitled to some honest sympathy. I don't imagine young Ripley will get much sympathy, will he?"

"Not a heap," Greg Holmes answered.

"Well," resumed Driggs, "I ain't a mite sorry for the boy and his make-believe pony. But I wish I could help you with your boat, for I know you haven't any loose money to throw around like young Rip."

Driggs dug his hands deep into his pockets and wrinkled his brow in thought.

At last he looked up hopefully.

"I'll tell you what I've been thinking about, boys. The town will be laughing at young Ripley to-morrow. But Rip, he'll be passing the laugh around on you young fellers, too. Now, I don't mind Rip's troubles; but it's different with you boys, and I know how it stings to part with all the money you could scrape together. Now, let's look this job over. I could say about thirty dollars for this job. It will cost twenty, and the other ten dollars would be profit, interest on my investment in my shop and so forth. Now, I'll let this job go at just the cost—twenty dollars, and throw off the profit and trimmings. Yes—to you young fellows—I'll call the job twenty dollars."

"That's kind of you," said Dick, with a grateful sigh. "But we want to be honest

with you, Mr. Driggs. Twenty dollars, or five, or a hundred—it would be all the same to us. We haven't the money."

"Not so fast," returned Driggs, his eyes twinkling. "I'll give you credit, and treat the debt as a matter of honor between us."

"But I don't know how we'd pay you back," Dick went on. "As it is, we've borrowed a good bit of money that we've got to pay back."

"Exactly," agreed Driggs, "and you want to pay the other money back before you pay me. Yes; I'll take the job at cost—twenty dollars, and I'll throw in the use of one of my teams and trucks to come up here and get the canoe."

"But I'm afraid, sir, that we'd be a very long time paying you."

"No, you won't," Driggs disputed. "I don't allow long time bills, but I'll show you a way to pay me back fairly early, if you boys have the energy—and I b'lieve you have. Now, you see, first off, boys, we'll need a lot of birch bark. I haven't any in stock, and the kind that is sound and good for canoe building is scarce these days. Now, first off, you'll have to range the woods for bark. Do you know where to find it?"

"Yes," Dick nodded. "Over on that place they call Katson's Hill."

"But that's about 'leven miles from here," objected Driggs.

"I know it is," Prescott answered. "But the point is that Katson's Hill is wild land. No tax assessor knows who is the owner of that land, and it wouldn't bring enough money to make it worth while to sell it at a sheriff's sale. So a number of farmers turn their cattle in there and use it for free grazing ground. As no owner can be found for the land we won't have to pay for the birch bark that we cut there."

"That's so," Driggs acknowledged. "But it's an awful distance, and over some mighty rough bits of road. You'll be about dead after you've packed a load of birch bark in from Katson's Hill."

"That wouldn't be anything, compared with having to do without our canoe," Dick returned.

"Maybe not," Driggs conceded. "Now, boys, is there much of that birch bark on Katson's Hill?"

"There must be several shiploads," Dave Darrin replied.

"Good enough. Then, see here. I'll take this job at twenty dollars, if you boys will get the birch bark. After you've brought in enough to patch the canoe then you can bring in enough more to amount to twenty dollars. Is that a go?"

"It's wonderfully kind of you," Dick answered gratefully.

"Not much it isn't," Driggs grinned, "and it will make that young Ripley cub feel mighty sore and cheap when he finds that he was the only one who got 'skinned' at this auction. But before you get through cutting and hauling birch bark you may think I'm a pretty hard taskmaster. I'll call it a go, if you boys will."

"We'll pay our full debt, Mr. Driggs, and pay you a load of thanks besides."

"All right," nodded Driggs, jumping down off the truck, in haste to get away from the embarrassment of being thanked. "Some of you just hang around here until my man, Jim Snowden, gets up here with the truck. After Jim starts away with your war canoe then you can leave the rest to me, except cutting and hauling several loads of birch bark to square up matters."

Driggs beat a hasty retreat now. When he had gone the members of Dick & Co. exchanged glances. Then Holmes began to dance his best idea of a jig.

"We'll have that bonfire at eight o'clock tonight, Greg," Dick reminded him with a smile.

"Will you?" demanded Greg, scowling fiercely. "If any of you fellows have any matches, then just keep away from that canoe,

or I'll fight. We can't afford to take any risks. Whoop!"

"Whoop!" answered Harry Hazelton, standing on his head.

"Whoop!" echoed Dave Darrin, giving Danny Grin a playful punch that sent Dalzell sprawling.

They were as happy a lot of boys as one could wish to see. They were to have their canoe and all the sport that that meant. It was to be a safe craft—as good as new! For Hiram Driggs was a dependable and skilful boat builder.

"Hey, too bad you fellows got stung so fearfully," cried a grammar school boy in passing. "I'm mighty sorry."

"Thank you," Dick answered. "But we're going to have the canoe repaired. We'll be having lots of fun in the war canoe after a few days."

"How you going to get her fixed?" asked the other boy.

"Hiram Driggs has taken the job, and you know what he can do with boats."

"Whee! I'm glad you're going to have the canoe fixed all right," nodded the other boy, and passed on.

Forty-five minutes after Driggs' departure Jim Snowden came up with the truck. With the

help of the boys he loaded the canoe from the other truck, then started away.

By this time the news had spread to other boys that Dick & Co. would soon have their war canoe afloat in fine order—that Hiram Driggs stood sponsor for the prediction.

That evening Fred Ripley had a somewhat unpleasant talk with his father.

"You've no business with pocket money," said Squire Ripley sternly. "You have no idea of the value of it."

"I thought I had made a good bargain," said Fred sullenly.

"So does every fool who parts with his money as easily as you do," returned the lawyer. "Well, enjoy yourself, my boy. If you'd rather have that paralyzed pony than the money I gave you to enjoy the summer with, I suppose you're entitled to your choice, though I don't like your judgment."

"Of course," suggested Fred, "since I've met with misfortune you won't be too hard on me. You'll let me have a little more money, so I won't have to go through the summer like a mucker."

"I'll give you no more spending money this summer," retorted the lawyer, adding, grimly: "If I did, you'd probably go and buy a cart to match your horse."

In fact Fred felt so uncomfortable at home that, just after dark, he started up Main Street.

"Where's your horse, Fred?" called Bert Dodge. "Why are you walking when you own one of the best steeds that ever came out of Arabia?"

"Shut up, won't you?" demanded Fred sulkily.

Bert chuckled for a while before he went on:

"Of course, I'm sorry for you, Fred, but it's all so funny that I can't help laughing."

"Oh, yes, it must be awfully funny," replied young Ripley testily.

"But you can afford it," said Bert. "You can get more money from your father."

"I suppose so," Ripley assented, not caring to repeat his interview with his father. "Anyway, I'm glad that Dick Prescott and the rest of his crowd got fooled as badly as I did. And they can't get any more money this summer."

"I guess they must have gotten some already," Bert rejoined. "Didn't you hear the news about that canoe?"

"What news?" asked Fred quickly.

"Why, they've engaged Hiram Driggs to put the canoe in good order."

"Where did they get the money?" asked Fred, his brow darkening.

"I don't know," was Bert's rejoinder. "But

they must be able to raise money all right, for Driggs has the canoe down at his yard, and he has promised it to them in a few days."

This news came like a slap in the face to the lawyer's son. He remained with Bert for another hour, but all the time Fred brooded over the fact that Dick & Co. were to have their canoe after all.

"At that, I don't know that they will have their canoe," Fred remarked darkly to himself as he started homeward.

Shortly after midnight Fred Ripley sneaked away from his home, turning his face in the direction of Hiram Driggs' boatyard.

CHAPTER IV

HIRAM PRIES A SECRET LOOSE

WHEN he left home Fred Ripley had no clearly defined idea as to what he meant to do.

However, he had in one pocket a keen-bladed pocket knife. Well wrapped in paper a short but sharp-edged chisel rested in one of the side pockets of his coat.

At the outset his only purpose was to do irreparable mischief to the war canoe. The means of accomplishing that purpose he must decide upon when he reached the boatyard.

How dark it was, and how hot! Late as the hour was the baking heat of the day did not seem to have left the ground. Fred walked along rapidly, fanning his perspiring face with his straw hat.

"They'll have their war canoe in the water in a few days, will they?" the lawyer's son muttered. "Humph!"

Through the side streets he went, keeping a sharp lookout. Conscious of the fact that he was bent on an unworthy errand, Fred did not care to be recognized abroad at this unusual hour.

In a few minutes he had reached the boat-yard. This was surrounded by a high board fence, and the gate was locked.

"It won't do to get over the fence," young Ripley decided. "I might be seen and watched. But I know a way."

At one corner of the yard the fence ran almost, though not quite to the bank of the river.

Keeping well within the shadow of the fence, young Ripley hastened toward this point.

Here the amount of space was not sufficient for him to step around the end of the fence. However, by grasping it on both sides Fred could swing himself around it and into the boatyard. He did so with ease, then halted, peering cautiously about the yard.

"No one here," the lawyer's son decided at last. "Whew! I wouldn't dare even to stumble over a tramp taking a nap here. This is ticklish business, or it would be if I were caught here. Now, where is the canoe?"

Early in the evening the moon had shone, but now the stars gave all the light there was to be had. It was so close in the yard that Fred soon pulled off his jacket, carrying it on his arm.

Nowhere in the open yard was the canoe to be seen. There were three semi-open sheds. Into each of these in turn Ripley peered. The canoe was nowhere to be found.

"I'm a fool to lose my sleep and take all the risk for this!" grunted the boy, halting and staring moodily about him in his great disappointment. He now glared angrily at a large building, two-thirds boathouse and one-third boat-building shop.

"Hiram Driggs had the canoe taken in there!" muttered the boy. "Just my luck. I couldn't get into that building unless I broke a window—and I don't dare do that."

Still determined to get at the canoe, if possible, Fred stole down to the inclined platform from which boats were carried to the water. But the water-front entrance to the boathouse also proved to be locked.

"There's no show for me here," grunted the young prowler. "I wonder if any of the windows have been left unlocked."

His good sense told him that it would be a serious matter indeed to raise a window and enter the building—if he were caught.

But Fred, after a few moments of strained listening, decided to take the chance. At any hazard that he dared take he must get to the war canoe and put it out of commission for all time.

He tried three of the windows. All of them proved to be locked.

"I'm going to have some more of my usual

luck," groaned young Ripley. "I wonder why it is that I always have such poor luck when I have my heart most set on doing a thing?"

He was slipping along to the fourth window when he heard a sound that almost caused his heart to stop beating.

Merely the sound of footsteps pausing by the gate to the boatyard—that was all, for a moment. But Fred cowered in acute dread.

"Who's in there?" called a steady voice, that filled Fred Ripley with consternation. He knew that voice! It belonged to a member of the Gridley police force.

"Talk about your tough luck!" shivered Fred. "This is the limit! Now, I'm in for it."

For a few moments he crouched close to the boathouse nearly paralyzed with fright. His consternation increased when a sound over by the fence indicated that the policeman was trying to mount that barrier.

Now, Fred's courage returned, or enough of it to enable him to try to escape. Bending low, he turned and ran swiftly, almost noiselessly. His speed astonished even himself. He gained the corner of the fence by which he had entered the yard. Taking a firm hold, he swung himself around the fence and out of sight just as the policeman's head showed over the top of it.

Fortunately for the fugitive, the policeman,

in climbing the fence, had made noise enough to drown the slight sounds produced by Ripley's frenzied flight.

His first thought being of burglars, the policeman drew his revolver as soon as his feet touched the ground inside the yard. With his left hand he held an electric pocket flash lamp, whose rays he flashed into the dark places.

Fred did not stop until he found himself safely within the grounds of his home. There he halted, fanning himself with his hat and taking long breaths. If discovered by anyone he could easily claim that he had found the night too hot to sleep inside and had come outdoors for air.

The next morning, about ten o'clock, Hiram Driggs, who had already been visited by Dick & Co., on their way to Katson's Hill, was called upon by Policeman Curtis of the Gridley force. Curtis, being off duty, was in citizen's clothes.

"Did you miss anything out of the plant this morning, Mr. Driggs?" inquired the guardian of life and property.

"Nothing that I know of," Driggs answered. "Why?"

"I thought I heard burglars about here last night, while on duty," the policeman explained. "I came up over the fence, and looked about the place, but couldn't find anything. Yes, I did,

too, though. I'll talk about that in a moment. You see, I went off duty at one o'clock this morning, so I didn't spend much time here. I'm on house reserve duty to-day. Now, for what I found here. I didn't find a living soul in the yard, but on the ground, near one of the open sheds, I came upon a chisel wrapped in a newspaper. I hid it, then, but I'll show it to you now. Maybe it belongs to the shop, and if so I've no business with it. But, if you don't recognize the chisel as yours, then I'll take it up to the station house and turn it over to the chief."

"After all that stretch o' talk," smiled Driggs, "you ought to show me a whole case full of chisels."

"I hid it over here," Curtis explained, going over to one of the open sheds. "I tucked it in under this packing case. Here it is, now, just where I left it. Do you recognize it as yours?"

From the newspaper wrapping Driggs took the small but keen-edged implement. He regarded it curiously. Then he turned the paper over slowly.

"Do you recognize it?" persisted the policeman.

"Mebbe," said Driggs. "I guess you can leave it here. But, in case any question should come up about it in the future, suppose you

write your autograph on the handle of the chisel."

Driggs passed over his fountain pen, the policeman obligingly obeying the request for his signature on the wood.

"Now, just for good measure, write your name across the top of the newspaper, too," Driggs proposed. Curtis did so.

"You seem to attach a good deal of importance to this find," hinted the policeman.

"Mebbe," assented Driggs indifferently. "Mebbe not. But you and I will both know this paper and the chisel again, if we see it, won't we?"

"We ought to," nodded the policeman. "But you don't consider the matter as important enough, then, to interest the police?"

"I wouldn't think o' bothering the police force about a trifling little matter like this," returned Driggs carelessly.

Just as soon, however, as the policeman had gone, Driggs darted into his private office. There he took up the telephone receiver and asked for Lawyer Ripley's residence number.

"Is Master Fred at home?" he inquired, when a servant of the Ripley household answered the telephone. Fred was at home, the servant replied, and then summoned Fred to the telephone.

"Well, who is it, and what is it?" asked Fred crossly.

"Hiram Driggs," responded the boat builder dryly. "That's 'who is it.' As to 'what is it,' if you'll take a quick run over to my office at the boatyard I'll tell you the rest of it."

"What on earth can you want to see me about?" Fred demanded.

Even over the wire, the note of dismay in Ripley's voice was plainly evident to Driggs, who chuckled.

"I can't tell you, over the wire, all that I want to see you about," Driggs replied. "You'd better come over here at once. I can promise you that it's something interesting."

"I—I don't believe I can come over to-day," Fred answered hesitatingly. "The weather is too hot."

"Mebbe the weather will get hotter, if you don't come," Hiram Driggs responded calmly.

"That's a joke, eh?" queried Fred. "Ha, ha, ha!"

"Depends upon the feller's sense of humor," Driggs declared. "Well, you're coming over, aren't you?"

"Ye-es, I'll come," Fred assented falteringly, for his guilty conscience made a coward of him. "You're a fine fellow, Mr. Driggs, and I'm glad to oblige anyone like you. I'll be right over."

"Thanks, ever so much, for the compliment," drawled Driggs in his most genial tone. "Such a compliment is especially appreciated when it comes from a young gentleman of your stripe. Good-bye."

That word "stripe" caused Fred Ripley to have a disagreeable chill. He remembered that "stripes" are an important part of the design on a convict's suit of state-furnished clothes.

"But he needn't think he can prove anything against me," Fred muttered to himself, as he started down the street. "Of couse, I know I lost that chisel last night, and Driggs may have found it in his boatyard. But he can't prove that the chisel belongs to me, or to our house. There are lots more chisels just like that one. If Driggs tries to bluff me he'll find that I'm altogether too cool for him!"

Nevertheless, it was an anxious young man who walked into the boat builder's office a few minutes later. Hiram Driggs, smiling broadly, held out his hand, which Fred took.

"Sorry I wasn't here when you called last night," said Driggs affably.

"I don't know what you mean," Fred rejoined promptly. "I didn't call at your house last night."

"Oh, no," Driggs replied. "I meant when you called here."

"I didn't call here, either."

"Ever see this before?" asked Driggs, holding up the chisel.

"Never," lied Fred.

"That's curious," said Driggs musingly. "Officer Curtis, the man on this beat, found the chisel here, and it was wrapped up in part of this newspaper."

Driggs brought forth from one of the drawers of his desk the newspaper in question.

"What has that scrap of paper to do with it?" asked Fred, speaking as coolly as he could.

"Why," explained Driggs, turning the paper over, "here's the mail sticker on this side, with your father's printed name and address pasted on it just as it came through the post-office."

Fred gasped audibly this time. Driggs surveyed his face with a keen, tantalizing gaze.

"Mebbe 'twas your father, then, who was in the yard last night, and who refused to answer the policeman's hail," suggested the boat builder. "I'd better go up to his office and show him these things and ask him, I guess."

"But I don't believe my father will know anything about it," spoke young Ripley huskily.

"Then your father will want to know something about it," Driggs went on. "He's a man of an inquiring turn of mind. Let 's run up to his office together and ask him."

"No, no, no!" urged Fred, his face growing paler.

"Then why were you here last night?"

"I wasn't here," protested the boy.

"Perhaps I can tell you why you were here," Driggs went on, never losing his affable smile. "You don't like Dick Prescott, and you don't like his boy friends. Prescott has been too many for you on more than one occasion. But that is no reason why you should enter my yard after midnight. That is no reason why you should want to do harm to a war canoe or to any other property that happens to be in my yard. I really don't know whether you're to be blamed for being a glib liar, Ripley. You've never given yourself much practice at telling the truth, you know. But I have this to say: If anything happens to that canoe, or to anything else here, I shall make it my business to get hold of Officer Curtis, and he and I will drop in and show your father this chisel, and this piece of paper that it was wrapped in. As you will see, Curtis has written his signature on the paper and on the handle of the chisel, so that he may identify them again at any time. Now, Ripley, I won't look for you to pay this yard any more visits except in a proper way and during regular business hours. Good morning!"

Hiram Driggs held out his hand as smilingly as ever, and Fred took it in a flabby grasp, feeling as though he were going to faint. Then without a word Ripley slunk out of the office, while Driggs gazed after him still smiling.

"The mean scoundrel!" panted Fred, as he hurried away, his knees trembling under him. "There isn't a meaner fellow in town than Hiram Driggs, and some day he'll go and tell my father just for spite. I know he will! Now, I've got to find some good way to account for that paper and chisel. I'll put in the day thinking up my story."

CHAPTER V

BIRCH BARK MERCHANTS

AWAY over on Katson's Hill six high school boys, stripped to their undershirts and trousers, were toiling hard, drenched in perspiration and with hands considerably the worse for their hard work.

"What we're finding out is that it's one thing to strip bark for fun, and quite another thing to take it off in pieces large enough for a boat-builder," Dick Prescott declared.

"It isn't as fast work as I thought it would be, either," Dave Darrin declared, running his knife slowly down the trunk of a young birch.

"What we need is to bring a grindstone along with us," Tom Reade grunted, as he examined the edge of the largest blade in his jackknife. "I simply can't cut with this knife any more."

"I couldn't cut with a fine razor," declared Greg Holmes. "Look at the blisters on my hands from the cutting I've already done."

"Never mind your aches and pains," comforted Dave Darrin. "We're doing this to pay charges on our canoe, and Hiram Driggs has been mighty kind about the whole business. Think of the fun we're going to have when that

canoe is launched; Now, fellows, Hiram Driggs has been mighty good to us, so I want to propose a plan for your approval. Whenever Driggs tells us that we've cut and hauled enough birch bark to pay him, then we must come out here and get still a few more loads, to pay him in good measure and show that we appreciate his kindness. Never mind how much our backs ache or our hands smart. Do you agree?"

"I'll fight any fellow in the crowd who doesn't agree," announced Tom Reade.

"You can't get up a fight with me on that score," retorted Greg. The others also quickly assented to Dave's plan.

By and by the youngsters halted for half an hour to eat the luncheons they had brought with them. Then they went at their work again.

At half-past three o'clock in the afternoon they tied up in bundles as much of the bark as each boy could carry, then started homeward.

"We ought to get home in time for supper," Dick declared hopefully.

It was about eight o'clock in the evening when they reached Greg's gate. The return was harder than they had expected. The road seemed to be twice as rough as it had been in the morning; they were utterly fagged, and discovered that even a load of birch bark can weigh a good deal under certain circumstances.

"Pile it up in the back of the yard," Greg suggested, "and we'll take it around to Mr. Driggs in the morning."

"Then we can hardly get back to Katson's Hill to-morrow, if we wait until the boatyard opens at eight o'clock," said Dave. "We ought to start for the hill before six, as we did this morning."

"We'll none of us feel like going to Katson's Hill early to-morrow morning," smiled Dick wearily. "Fellows, I guess we'll have to put in twice as much time, and go every other day. I'm afraid it's going to be a little too much for us to do every day."

So this was agreed upon, though rather reluctantly, for Dick & Co. were anxious to repay Driggs at the earliest date.

Not one of the six boys appeared on Main Street that evening. Each of them, after eating supper, crept away to bed to ease the aching of his muscles in slumber.

The next morning they met at Greg's gate shortly after seven o'clock.

"The loads will seem lighter to-day," laughed Dick.

"But to-morrow—oh, me, oh, my!" groaned Reade, making a comical face.

"It's the 'White Man's Burden,' you know," Dick laughed.

"What is?" Dave inquired.

"Debt—and its consequences."

"My father has a horror of debt," Tom announced.

"Well, I guess the black side of debt shows only when one doesn't intend to make an effort to pay it," Dick suggested. "The whole business world, so we were taught at high school, rests on a foundation of debt. The man who doesn't contract debts bigger than he can pay, won't find much horror in owing money. We owe Hiram Driggs twenty dollars, or rather we're going to owe it. But the bark we're going to take in to him to-day is going to pay a part of that debt. A few days more of tramping, blistered hands and aching backs, and we'll be well out of debt and have the rest of the summer for that great old canoe!"

"Let's make an early start with the bark," proposed Tom. "I want to see if the stuff feels as heavy as it did late yesterday afternoon."

"Humph! My load doesn't seem to weigh more than seven ounces," Darrin declared, as he shouldered one of the piles of bark.

"Lighter than air this morning," quoth Tom, "and only a short haul at that."

When Hiram Driggs reached his boatyard at eight o'clock he found Dick & Co. waiting for him.

"Well, well, well, boys!" Mr. Driggs called cheerily. "So you didn't back out."

"Did you think we would, sir?" Dick inquired.

"No; I knew you boys wouldn't back out. And I don't believe you threw away any bark on the way home, just to lighten your loads."

Hiram went about the yard starting the day's work for his men, then came back to the boys.

"Now, just bring the bark over to the platform and we'll look it over and sort it," suggested the boat builder.

Dick & Co. carried their loads over to the platform, where they cut the lashings.

"We'll make three heaps of the stuff," Driggs proposed. "One heap will be the worthless stuff that has to be thrown away. Another heap will be for the pieces that are good but small; they'll do for patches. The third heap will be the whole, sound strips. Mebbe I'd better do all the sorting myself."

So the boys stood by, watching Driggs as he sorted the bundles of bark with the speed of a man who knows just what he wants. A quantity of the bark went on to the "worthless" heap, yet there was a goodly amount in each of the other piles by the time that the boat builder was through sorting it.

"You've done first rate, boys," he announced

at last. "Is there much more of that bark on Katson's Hill?"

"We ought to be able to bring in fifty times as much bark as we've brought already," Dick answered.

"I wish you would," Driggs retorted.

"And give up the whole of our summer vacation?" Danny Grin asked anxiously.

"Well, there is that side to it, after all," Driggs admitted quickly. "It must be a tough job on your backs, too. But, boys, I wouldn't mind having a lot of this stuff, for birch bark canoes are coming into favor again. The only trouble is that birch bark is hard to get, these days, and costs a lot to boot. So it makes birch-bark canoes come pretty high. At the same time, there are plenty of wealthy folks who would pay me well for a birch-bark canoe. Now, I know that you boys, owning a canoe that will soon be in the water, won't be anxious to give up your whole summer to doing jobs for me. But couldn't you bring in a lot more bark if you had a team of horses and a good-sized wagon?"

"Of course we could," Dick nodded. "But we haven't any horses or a wagon."

"I was thinking," Driggs went on slowly. "I can spare my gray team and the big green wagon. Any of you boys know how to drive?"

"All of us do," Dick answered, "though I guess Tom could handle a team better than any of the rest of us."

"Then suppose you take my team out at six o'clock to-morrow morning?" Driggs suggested. "I'll have to charge you four dollars a day for it, but I'll take it in bark as payment. With the wagon you'll be able to bring in a lot more bark than you could without a wagon."

"It's a fine idea, sir," glowed Dick, "and you're mighty kind to us."

"Not especially kind," smiled the boat builder. "I can use a lot of this bark in my business, and I'm glad to get it on as reasonable a basis as you boys can bring it to me. You see, it's lucky that Katson's Hill is wild and distant land. If we had a land owner to deal with he'd make us pay high for the privilege of stripping the bark."

"But why couldn't you send your own workmen out to cut the bark?" Dick asked. "They've as much right on Katson's Hill as we have."

"Oh, yes; I could do that," Driggs assented. "And I could make a little more money that way, mebbe. But would it be square business, after you young men have trusted me with your business secret as to where bark can be had for nothing?"

That was a ruggedly honest way of putting it that impressed Dick & Co.

"I'll tell you what you might do, Mr. Driggs," hinted Tom Reade. "You might lend us a grindstone, if you have one to spare. Then we can sharpen our knives right on the spot and cut bark faster."

"You can have the grindstone," Driggs assented. "And I'll do better than that. I can spare half a dozen knives from the shop that are better than anything you carry in your pockets. Oh, we'll rush this business along fast."

Six utterly happy high school boys reported at Hiram Driggs' stable at six o'clock the next morning. They harnessed the horses, put the grindstone in the wagon and all climbed aboard. Two seats held them all, and there was room for a load of bark, besides, several times as large as Dick & Co. could carry on their backs.

Work went lightly that day! The shop knives cut far better than pocket knives could do, and the stone was at hand for sharpening. Six laughing and not very tired boys piled aboard the wagon that afternoon, with what looked like a "mountain" of prime birch bark roped on.

For seven more working days Dick & Co. toiled faithfully, at the end of which time they

discovered that they had about "cleaned" Katson's Hill of all the really desirable bark.

"Your canoe will be dry enough to launch in the morning," said Driggs, as he received the last load at his stable. "Come down any time after eight o'clock and we'll put it in the water."

Were Dick & Co. on hand the next morning?

Dan Dalzell was the last of the six boys to reach post outside the locked gate of the yard, and he was there no later than twenty-one minutes past seven!

CHAPTER VI

MEETING THE FATE OF GREENHORNS

AT five minutes before eight Hiram Driggs arrived, keys in hand.

"I see you're on time," he smiled, unlocking the gate and throwing it open. "Now come in and we'll run your canoe out on the river float."

Even in the dim light of the boathouse Dick & Co. could see the sides of the canoe glisten with their coating of pitch and oil that lay outside the bark. The war canoe looked like a bran-new craft!

"Do you like her?" queried Driggs, with a smile of pride in the work of his yard.

"Like her?" echoed Dick, a choking feeling in his throat. "Mr. Driggs, we can't talk—yet!"

"Get hold," ordered the boat builder. "Carry her gently."

Gently? Dick & Co. lifted their beloved treasure as though the canoe carried a cargo of eggs.

Out into the morning sun they carried her, letting her down with the stern right at the water's edge.

"O-o-o-oh!" It would be hard to say which one of Dick & Co. started that murmur of intense admiration.

"Now, if you can take your eyes off that canoe long enough," proposed Driggs, after all hands, the builder included, had feasted their eyes for a few minutes upon the canoe, "come into the office and we'll attend to a little business."

Not quite comprehending, the high school boys followed Driggs, who seated himself at his desk, picking up a sheet of paper.

"Prescott, I take it you're the business manager of this crowd," the boat builder went on. "Now, look over these figures with me, and see if everything is straight. Here are the different loads of bark you've brought in. I figure them up at $122.60. See if you make it the same?"

"Of course I do," nodded Dick, not even looking at the figures.

"Careless of you, not to watch another man's figuring," remarked Hiram Driggs. "Now, then, the bark you've brought in comes to just what I've stated. Against that is a charge for the team and wagon, eight days at four dollars a day—thirty-two dollars. Twenty dollars for fixing your canoe. Total charges, fifty-two dollars. Balance due you for bark, seventy dollars and sixty cents. That's straight, isn't it?"

"I—I don't understand," faltered Dick Prescott.

"Then see if this will help you to understand," proposed Driggs, drawing a roll of bills from his pocket and laying down the money. Here you are, seventy dollars and sixty cents."

"But we didn't propose to sell you any bark," Dick protested. "All we expected to do was to bring you in good measure to pay you for all your kindness to us."

"Kindness to you boys?" demanded Driggs, his shrewd eyes twinkling. "I hope I may go through life being as profitably kind to others. Boys, the bark you've sold me will enable me to make up several canoes at a fine, fat profit. Take your pay for the goods you've delivered!"

Dick glanced at his chums, who looked rather dumbfounded. Then he picked up the bills with an uneasy feeling.

"Thank you, then," young Prescott continued. "But there is one little point overlooked, Mr. Driggs. You did the canoe for us at cost, though your price to any other customer would have been thirty dollars."

"Oh, we'll let it go at that," Driggs suggested readily. "I'm coming out finely on the deal."

"We won't let it go at that, if you please, sir," Dick Prescott retorted firmly.

Dick placed a ten dollar bill on the desk, adding:

"That makes the full thirty dollars for the repairing of the canoe."

"I don't want to take it," said Driggs gruffly.

"Then we won't take any of this money for the bark," insisted Dick, putting the rest of the money back on the table.

"If you corner me like that," muttered Driggs, "I'll have to take your ten dollars. Now put the rest of the money back in your pocket, and divide it among your crowd whenever you're ready. Wait a minute until I make out a receipt for repairing the canoe. I'll put the receipt in your name, Prescott."

Driggs wrote rapidly, then reached for another paper.

"And now," he laughed, "since you're so mighty particular about being exact in business, you may as well sign a receipt for the money paid you for the bark."

Signatures were quickly given.

"Now, I reckon you boys want to get out to your canoe," the builder hinted.

"Yes, but we can't take Dick with us," Tom declared. "Not with all that money belonging to the company in his pocket. Dick, before you step into the canoe you'd better leave the money

with Mr. Driggs, if he'll oblige us by taking care of it."

Driggs dropped the money in an envelope, putting the latter in his safe.

"Call and get it when you're going away," he said.

"Some day, when we recover, Mr. Driggs," said Dick earnestly, "we're going to come in and try to thank you as we should."

"If you do," retorted the boat builder gruffly, "I'll throw you all out. Our present business deal is completed, and the papers all signed. Git!"

Driggs followed them out to show them how to launch the canoe with the least trouble.

"Have any of you boys ever handled a paddle before?" inquired Hiram Driggs.

"Oh, yes; in small cedar canoes," Dave answered.

"All of you?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then you ought to get along all right in this craft. But be careful at first, and don't try any frolicking when you're aboard. Remember, a canoe isn't a craft that can be handled with roughness. Don't anyone try to 'rock the boat,' either. In a canoe everyone has to sit steadily and attend strictly to business."

"A war canoe! Isn't it great?" chuckled Dan, as he started to help himself to a seat.

But Tom grabbed him by the coat collar, pulling him back.

"First of all, Danny Grin, shed that coat. Then ask Dick which seat you're going to have. He's the big chief of our tribe of Indians."

"Better all of you leave your coats here," suggested Driggs. "You can get 'em when you come back. And you can keep the canoe here without charge, so you'll have a safe place for it. Some fellows, you know, might envy you so that they might try to destroy the canoe if you left it in a place that isn't locked up at night."

When the boys were ready, in their shirt sleeves, Dick assigned Dave Darrin to the bow seat. The others were placed, while Prescott himself took the stern seat, from which the steering paddle must be wielded.

"All ready, everyone," Dick called. "Dave, you set the stroke, and give us a slow, easy one. We mustn't do any swift paddling until we've had a good deal of practice. Shove off, Dave."

Darrin pushed his paddle against the float, Dick doing likewise at the stern. Large as it was, the canoe glided smoothly across the water.

"Now, give us the slow stroke, Dave!" Dick called.

Soon the others caught the trick of paddling in unison. Each had his own side of the craft on which to paddle. Dick, alone, as steersman, paddled on either side at will, according as he wished to guide the boat.

"You're doing finely," called Hiram Driggs.

"Let's hit up the speed a bit," urged Dan Dalzell.

"We won't be in too big a hurry about that," Dick counseled. "Let us get the knack of this thing by degrees."

"Whee! When we do get to going fast I'll wager there is a lot of fine old speed in this birch-bark tub!" chuckled Tom Reade.

Dick now headed the canoe up the river. For half a mile or more they glided along on a nearly straight course.

To say that these Gridley high school boys were happy would be putting it rather mildly. There was exhilaration in every move of this noble sport. Nor was it at all like work. The canoe seemed to require but very little power to send her skimming over the water.

At last Dick guided the canoe in an easy, graceful turn, heading down the river once more.

"Now, you can try just a little faster stroke, Dave," Dick suggested. "And make it just a bit heavier on the stroke, fellows, but don't

imagine that we're going to try any racing speed."

"Hurrah!"

"Zip!"

"Wow!"

It was great sport! Just the small increase in the stroke sent the handsome big war canoe fairly spinning down the river.

"I never dreamed it would be like this!" cried Dave Darrin, in ecstasy. "Fellows, I don't believe there is any fun in the world equal to canoeing in a real canoe."

"It beats all the little cedar contraptions that some folks call canoes!" Tom Reade declared.

"I am almost beginning to think," announced Danny Grin, "that I'd rather go on canoeing than go home for my dinner."

"That idea would last until about half-past twelve," chuckled Reade. "This is glorious fun, all right, but dinner has its place, too. As for me, I want to get my dinner strictly on time."

"Glutton!" taunted Greg Holmes.

"Don't you believe it," Reade retorted. "I want my dinner right on time so that I can get back for a longer afternoon in the canoe."

"Fellows," announced Dave Darrin solemnly, "we've got to form a canoe club."

"Humph!" retorted Greg Holmes. "We

don't want to belong to any club where the other fellows have only the fourteen or sixteen-foot cedar canoes."

"We don't have to," Dave explained. "We'll limit the membership to those who own war canoes like this one. In other words, we'll be the whole club."

"What's the need of our forming a club?" asked Greg Holmes. "We're as good as being a club already. We're always together in everything, aren't we?"

"Still, it won't do any harm to have a regular club name for the summer," Dick Prescott suggested.

"What would we call the club?" asked Hazelton.

"Why not call it the Gridley High School Canoe Club?" Dick demanded.

"Best name possible," Tom agreed.

"Some of the other high school fellows might get sore at us, though," Tom hinted. "They might say we had no right to take the high school name."

"We won't take it for ourselves only," Dick smiled. "We'll keep the club membership open to any set of six fellows who will own and run a war canoe. We'll keep the membership as open as possible to the high school fellows."

"Humph! And then Fred Ripley, Bert

Dodge and a few others with plenty of cash would get a canoe and insist on coming in and spoiling the club."

"They might," Dick assented, "but I don't believe they would. Fred Ripley, Bert Dodge and a few others of their kind in the Gridley High School wouldn't spend five cents to join anything we're in."

Toot! toot! sounded a whistle shrilly behind them.

Dick turned carefully to glance at the bend above them.

"Steam launch, with an excursion party," he informed the others. "I think I see Laura Bentley and Belle Meade in the bow waving handkerchiefs at us."

Dan Dalzell turned abruptly around. Harry Hazelton did the same.

"Look out!" cried Greg, as he shifted swiftly to steady the craft.

Just then Tom Reade turned, too. His added weight sent the canoe careening. There was a quick scramble to right the craft.

Flop! The canoe's port rail was under water. She filled and sank, carrying a lot of excited high school boys down at the same time.

CHAPTER VII

"DANNY GRIN" IS SILENT

DICK PRESCOTT sank into the water not more than two or three feet. Then his head showed above the surface of the river. He struck out vigorously, looking about him.

"The canoe is done for!" he gasped.

Too-oot! too-oot! too-oot! The steam launch was now speeding to the scene, its whistle screeching at a rate calculated to inform everyone in Gridley of another river disaster.

Up came Greg, then Dave. Tom Reade's head appeared down stream. Harry Hazelton bobbed up not six feet from Dick. Hazelton blew out a mouthful of water, then called:

"Everyone up, Dick?"

"All but Dan."

"What——"

"I guess he's all right. Danny Grin is a good swimmer, you know."

Half a dozen river craft were now heading their way, but the launch was the only power boat in sight.

Five members of Dick & Co. now got close together.

"We've got to go down after Danny Grin," Reade declared. "You fellows watch, and I'll get as close to bottom as I can."

Tom sank. To the anxious boys he seemed to be gone for an age. He came up alone.

"Did you see Dan?" Dick faltered.

"Not a glimpse of him," returned Tom despairingly.

"See the canoe?"

"No."

"Then you couldn't have gone down in the right place," Dick argued.

"I'll try it, fellows!" exclaimed Darrin.

Down went Dave. He soon came up, treading water. As soon as he had blown out a mouthful of water he exclaimed:

"I found Dan, but I couldn't stay under long enough. He went down with the canoe. He's lying in it now."

"Look out, there! We'll pick you up," called a voice from the launch, which now darted toward the boys. A bell for half speed, then another for "stop" sounded, and the hull of the launch divided the frightened swimmers.

"Let me get aboard!" cried Dick, taking a few lusty over-hand strokes.

Willing hands hauled him into the launch at the bow, while girls' cries and anxious questions filled the air.

"What's the matter?"

"Who——"

But Dick waited to answer no one. Standing in the bow of the launch, he pointed his hands, then dived into the river.

While he was below the surface of the water the other canoeists swam alongside, helping themselves aboard.

"Oh, Dave!" cried Laura Bentley. "What's wrong?"

"Dan Dalzell hasn't come up," Darrin choked. "Here, clear the way. I'm going down after Dick."

He was gone like a flash. Seconds ticked by while a score of pale faces watched over the side of the launch.

Then, at last, up shot Dave. He was followed almost instantly by Dick, his arms wrapped around the motionless form of Dan Dalzell.

"Get close and we'll haul you in!" called Tom Reade, a boat-hook in his hand.

"Is Dan drowned?" demanded a dozen voices.

"Don't ask questions now!" cried Tom Reade impatiently, without looking about him. "Keep quiet! It's a time for work."

Abashed, the questioners became silent. Tom caught the boat-hook through the collar of

Dan's flannel shirt. With the aid of the launch's helmsman Reade drew Dan in and got him aboard. Young Dalzell's eyes were closed, nor did he speak.

Then Dick and Dave were pulled aboard the launch.

"Dan didn't seem to be able to free himself," Darrin explained breathlessly. "His foot was wedged under a cleat in the canoe."

"Carry Dan aft," ordered Dick, while he was still clambering over the rail. "Lay him face down."

Then, drenched as he was, Dick hastened aft, where he directed others how to pat Dan on the back and to work his arms.

"We've got to get that water off his lungs," Dick explained. "Don't stop working for a moment. I wish we had a barrel to roll him on!"

"We will have soon," replied the launch's helmsman, rushing back to his post and ringing the bell. Thus recalled to his post, the engineer turned on the speed.

The craft made swiftly for Hiram Driggs' float. A few moments later it ran alongside.

Warned by the whistle, Driggs and two of his workmen came running out to the float.

"Get a barrel as quickly as you can!" shouted young Prescott.

By the time Dalzell had been hustled ashore the barrel was in readiness. Dan received an energetic rolling. Three or four little gushes of water issued from his mouth.

"Keep up the good work," ordered Dick feverishly. "We'll bring him around soon."

When they saw that no more water was coming from Dalzell's mouth the workers placed him in a sitting position, then began to pump-handle his arms vigorously.

A tremor ran through the body of Danny Grin.

"Hurrah!" cried Dick. "He's going to open his eyes!"

This Dan did a few moments later.

"Keep on working his arms," commanded Prescott.

"Quit!" begged Dalzell in a faint whisper. "You're hurting me."

"Good enough!" chuckled Dick. "Keep on at his arms until he can talk a whole lot more."

"But isn't it cruel?" asked a girl.

"No," rejoined Tom Reade, turning to her. "Did you ever bring a drowning man to?"

"Never, of course."

"Then let our Dick have his way. He generally knows what he's about. No rudeness intended you understand," Reade added, smiling.

"This lad's all right, now," declared Hiram Driggs. "Help him to his feet and walk him about a bit until he gets the whole trick of breathing again. Dalzell, didn't you know any better than to try to swallow the whole river and ruin my business?"

A faint grin parted Dan's lips.

"Oh, I'm so thankful," sighed Laura Bentley. "Dick, I was afraid there would be but five of you left when I saw Dan being hoisted aboard!"

Soon Dalzell was able to laugh nervously. Then a scowl darkened his face.

"I'm the prize idiot of Gridley!" he muttered faintly.

"What's the matter now?" Dave Darrin demanded.

"The canoe is lost, and it's all my fault," moaned Dalzell. "Oh, dear! Oh, dear!"

"Bother the canoe!" cried Dick impatiently. "We're lucky enough that no lives have been lost."

"But I—I turned and upset the craft," wailed Dan.

"There were others of us," said Greg sheepishly. "If we had had the sense of babies none of us would have turned, and there wouldn't have been any accident."

"This is no time to talk about canoe eti-

quette," Prescott declared. "Let us be thankful that we're all here. We'll wait until Dan is himself again before we do any talking."

"I'm all right," protested Dan Dalzell.

"Yes; I b'lieve you are," Driggs nodded. " 'T' any rate, you won't die now of that dose of river water."

"Party ready to come back aboard the launch?" called the helmsman.

"Oh, don't hurry us, just now!" appealed Laura Bentley, going over to him quietly. "We're all so interested and concerned in what is going on over here."

So the helmsman waited, grumbling quietly to himself.

Some twenty of the high school girls had chartered the launch for a morning ride up the river. Dainty enough the girls looked in their cool summer finery. They formed a bright picture as they stood grouped about Dick & Co. and the other male members of the party.

"You fellows can say all you want to," mumbled Dan, "but the canoe is gone for good and all! We won't have any more fun in it this summer."

"Was that what ailed you, Dan?" teased Darrin. "You felt so badly over the loss of the canoe that you tried to stay on the bottom of the river with it?"

"My foot was caught, and I couldn't get it loose," Dan explained. "I was trying to free myself, like mad, you may be sure, when all at once I didn't know anything more. You fellows must have had a job prying my foot loose."

"It was something of a job," Dick smiled, "especially as our time was so limited down there at the bottom with you. The river must be twenty feet deep at that point."

"All of that," affirmed Hiram Driggs.

By this time the high school girls had divided into little groups, each group with a member of Dick & Co. all to itself. The girls were engaging in that rather senseless though altogether charming hero worship so dear to the heart of the average schoolboy.

"What caused the accident?" inquired one girl.

"Gallantry," smiled Greg. "We were all so anxious to see you girls that we all turned at the same time. We made the canoe heel, and then it filled and went down. But you can't blame us, can you?"

"But you've lost your fine big canoe," cried Laura Bentley, looking as though her pretty eyes were about to fill with tears.

"Yes," Dick admitted, "and, of course, it's too bad. But a lot of other worse things might

have happened, and I guess we'll get over our loss some way."

"But that canoe meant so much for your summer fun," Laura went on. "Oh, it's too bad!"

"Maybe the canoe isn't lost," suggested Hiram Driggs.

"What do you mean, Mr. Driggs?" cried Laura, turning to him quickly.

"Is there any way of bringing the canoe up again?" asked Belle Meade eagerly.

"There may be," Driggs replied quietly. "I'm going to have a try at it anyway."

"All aboard that are going back to the dock," called the helmsman of the launch, who was also her owner.

Laura turned upon him with flashing eyes.

"I don't believe there is anyone going," she said. "We wouldn't leave here anyway, while there's a chance that the high school boys can get their canoe back to the surface of the water. You needn't wait, Mr. Morton. When we're ready we can walk the rest of the way."

CHAPTER VIII

WHAT AN EXPERT CAN DO

"I DON'T say that I can surely raise the canoe," Mr. Driggs made haste to state, "or that it will be worth the trouble if we do raise it. That canoe may have sunk on river-bottom rocks, and she may be badly staved by this time. But I've sent one of my men to fire the scow engine, and I'm going out to see what can be done in the matter."

"And may we wait here?" asked Laura Bentley, full of eagerness.

"Certainly, young ladies."

"Oh, that's just fine of you, Mr. Driggs," cried Belle Meade.

Smoke soon began to pour out of the short funnel of the working engine on the boatyard scow. It was a clumsy-looking craft—a mere floating platform, with engine, propeller, tiller and a derrick arrangement, but it had done a lot of good work at and about the boatyard.

"You want to get aboard the scow now, boys," called Mr. Driggs. "If we do anything real out yonder I'll have need of some willing muscle."

"Can't some of the girls go, too?" called a

feminine voice. "We're all dreadfully anxious, you know."

Hiram pursed up his mouth, as though reluctant. Then he proposed, grudgingly:

"A committee of two girls might go, if they're sure they'll keep out of the way when we're working. Just two! Which of the young ladies ought we to take, Mr. Prescott?"

"Why, I believe Miss Bentley and Miss Meade will be as satisfactory a committee as can be chosen," Dick smiled.

Some of the girls frowned their disappointment at being left out, but others clapped their hands. Laura and Belle stepped on the scow's platform.

"I wouldn't try to go, if I were you, Dan," urged Dick, as young Dalzell stepped forward to board the scow.

"I'm all right," Dan insisted.

"Sure you're all right?" questioned Hiram Driggs, eyeing Danny Grin's wobbly figure.

"Of course I am," Dan protested, though he spoke rather weakly.

"Then there's a more important job for you," declared Mr. Driggs. "Stay here on the float with the rest of the young ladies, and explain to them just what you see us doing out yonder."

There was the sound of finality about the boat builder's voice, kindly as it was.

"Cast off," ordered Driggs, taking the tiller. "Tune up that engine and give us some headway."

Clara Marshall was thoughtful enough to run back and get a chair, which she brought down to the float and placed behind Dalzell.

"Sit down," she urged.

"Thank you," said Dan gratefully, "but I didn't need a chair."

Nevertheless the high school girls persuaded him to be seated.

"I wasn't drowned, you know," Dan protested as he sat down.

"No; but you got a little water into your lungs," responded one of the girls. "I heard Mr. Driggs tell Dick Prescott that, as nearly as they could guess, you opened your mouth a trifle just before Dick and Dave reached you and freed you from that awful trap. Mr. Driggs said that if you had been under water two minutes longer there would have been a different story to tell."

"I wonder how long I was under water?" mused Dan.

"Long enough to drown, Danny Grin," replied Clara Marshall gravely.

Meanwhile the scow was making slow headway out into the river and slightly up stream.

"Dick, don't you think this canoeing is going

to prove too dangerous a sport for you boys?" asked Laura, regarding him with anxious eyes.

"Not when we get so that we know how to behave ourselves in a canoe, Laura," young Prescott answered.

"Yet, no matter how skilful you become, some unexpected accident may happen at any moment," she urged.

"You wouldn't have us be mollycoddles, would you?" asked Dick in surprise.

"Certainly not," replied Laura with emphasis.

"Yet you would advise us to avoid everything that may have some touch of danger in it."

"I wouldn't advise that, either," Laura contended with sweet seriousness. "But——"

"You'd like to see us play football some day, wouldn't you?"

"I certainly hope you'll make the high school eleven."

"Football is undoubtedly more dangerous than canoeing," Dick claimed.

"It seems too bad that boys' best sports should be so dangerous, doesn't it?" questioned young Miss Bentley.

"I can't agree with you," Dick answered quietly. "It takes danger, and the ability to meet it, to form a boy's character into a man's."

"Then you believe in being foolhardy, as a matter of training?" asked Laura, with a swift flash of her eyes.

"By no means," Prescott rejoined. "Foolhardy means just what the word implies, and only a fool will be foolhardy. If we had been trying to upset the canoe, as a matter of sport, that would have been the work of young fools."

It was not difficult to locate the spot where the canoe had gone down. The river's current was not swift, and the paddles now floated not very far below the spot where the cherished craft of Dick & Co. had gone down.

"Do you want the services of some expert divers, Mr. Driggs?" asked Dave, turning from a brief chat with Belle Meade.

"Not you boys," retorted the boat builder. "You youngsters have been fooling enough with the river bottom for one day."

"Then how do you expect to get hold of the canoe, sir?" asked Tom Reade.

"We'll grapple with tackle," replied Driggs, going toward an equipment box that stood on the forward end of the scow. "We'll use the same kind of tackle that we've sometimes dragged the bottom with when looking for drowned people."

Laura Bentley shivered slightly at his words. Driggs' keen eyes noted the fact, and thereafter

he was careful not to mention drowned people in her hearing.

The tackle was soon rigged. Tom Reade and Harry Hazelton, who possessed the keenest interest in things mechanical, aided the boat builder under his direction.

Back and forth over the spot the scow moved, while the grapples were frequently shifted and recast.

"Stop the engine," called Driggs. "We've hooked into something!"

Laura turned somewhat pale for a moment; Belle, too, looked uneasy. The same thought had crossed both girls' minds. What if the tackle had caught the body of some drowned man?

"We'll shift about here a bit," Driggs proposed, nodding to the engineer to stand by ready to stop or start the engine on quick signal.

Before long the grappling hook of another line was caught.

"The two lines are about twelve feet apart," Driggs announced. "My idea is that we've caught onto two cross braces of the canoe. If so we'll have it up in a jiffy."

Both lines were now made fast to the derrick, in such a way that there would be an even haul on both lines. Belting was now connected between the engine and a windlass.

"Haul away, very slowly," Driggs ordered.

Up came the lines, an inch at a time. Belle and Laura could not resist the temptation to go to the edge of the scow and peer over.

"I see something coming up," cried Belle at last.

"It's the canoe," said Tom Reade, trying to speak carelessly, though there was a ring of exultation in his voice.

Nearer and nearer to the surface of the water came the canoe.

"Now, watch for my hand signal all the time," called Driggs. "I don't want to get the middle part of the canoe more than an inch above the surface."

When the point of the canoe's prow rose above the surface of the water a cheer went up from the scow that carried the news instantly back to the landing float.

Danny Grin stood up, waving his hat and cheering hoarsely, while the girls who surrounded him waved handkerchiefs and parasols.

Then the gunwale appeared just above water along the whole length.

"It will be a hard job to bail her out now," Dave declared.

"Not so hard that it will worry you any," Driggs smiled.

He dragged a pump over, allowing its flex-

ible pipe to rest down into the water in the canoe.

"Now, some of you youngsters get hold of the pump handles," Driggs ordered.

Five high school boys got hold with a will. Gradually, as the water was emptied out of her the canoe rose higher and higher in the water.

There was no cheering, now, from the boys on the scow. They were using all their breath working the pump, while Driggs carefully directed the bottom of the flexible tubing.

"There!" declared Driggs at last. "Barring a little moisture, your canoe is as dry as ever it was, boys. I can't see a sign of a leak anywhere, either. But don't make a practice of tipping it over every day, for I can't afford to leave my work to help you out. There's your canoe, and she's all right."

Dick got hold of the painter at the bow, while Driggs released the grappling tackle.

What a cheer went up from the scow, and what a busy scene there was on the float as the young women jumped up and down in their glee over the good fortune of Dick & Co.

"Now, we'll cruise down and get the paddles," Driggs proposed.

"As soon as we pick up a couple of them, Dick and I can take the canoe and get the rest," Dave suggested.

"You can—not, while the young ladies are with us," Hiram Driggs contradicted. "Do you want to scare them to death by having another upset?"

Laura shot a grateful glance at kindly Hiram Driggs. The scow moved forward, cruising among the paddles until all of them had been recovered.

"Now, Mr. Driggs, won't you stop a moment?" asked young Prescott. "It will be a bit humiliating to be towed into dock. Wait, and let us get into the canoe. We'd rather take it ashore under our own power."

Laura hoped Hiram Driggs would veto the idea, but he didn't.

The canoe was brought alongside, and five boys stepped carefully into it, seating themselves.

"Room for one young lady in here, if we can find a fair way of drawing lots between them," suggested Dick playfully.

"They won't step into the canoe, just now, if I can prevent them," Driggs declared flatly. "You boys want just a few minutes' more practice at your new game before you risk the lives of these girls."

"You're right, I'm afraid, Mr. Driggs," Dick Prescott admitted with a smile. "But, before long, we hope to take out as many of the

high school girls as care to step into this fine old war canoe."

"I hope you won't forget that," Belle Meade flashed at him smilingly.

"We won't," Dave promised her. "And you and Laura shall have the first invitation."

"I shall be ready," Laura replied, "just as soon as you boys feel that you can take proper care of us in the canoe."

"You'll have to do your own share of taking care," Tom Reade responded. "About all a passenger has to learn in a canoe is to take a seat right in the middle of the canoe, and to keep to that place without moving about."

Dick & Co., minus Danny Grin, now paddled off, reaching the float some moments before the scow got in.

"Young ladies," said Dick, as he stepped to the float, "I don't know how many of you will care about going out in our canoe, but we wish to invite all who would like it to try a trip within the next few days. Four boys and two girls can go out at a time, and in case of mishap that would leave two good swimmers to look after each girl. We shall be glad if you will permit us to invite you in couples."

Despite the accident of the morning the invitation was greeted with enthusiasm.

CHAPTER IX

DICK TREMBLES AT HIS NERVE

HIRAM DRIGGS refused to accept any money for his trouble in raising the canoe.

"I won't charge you anything, unless upsetting your craft becomes a troublesome habit," the boat builder declared. "Remember, I'm a big winner on our birch bark trade."

Within the next four days all of the girls invited had been able to take a trip up the river and back.

By this time Dick & Co. had fully acquired the mastery of their canoe. They had had no more upsets, for "Big Chief Prescott," of this new Gridley tribe of young Indians, had succeeded in putting through some rules governing their conduct when the chums were out in their canoe. One of these rules was that no one should change his position in the craft except the steersman at the stern. Others would not look about at a hail unless informed by the steersman that they might do so.

Not by any means did Dick do all the steering of the craft. Each of his chums had a frequent turn at it, and at the other positions in the

canoe, until all were expert at any part of the work.

"But there is one big drawback about having this canoe," Greg remarked one day.

"What's that?" asked Dave.

"There are no canoes to race with."

"There are up at Lake Pleasant," Dick replied.

"But we can't take the canoe up there," Tom Reade objected. "It's twenty-four miles from Gridley."

"Couldn't we walk there and carry the canoe on our shoulders?" suggested Dave.

While they were discussing this, the canoe lay on the float, whence they were soon to take it into the boathouse.

"We can try it now," suggested Dick.

Getting a good hold, Dick & Co. raised the war canoe to their several shoulders. They found they could accomplish the feat, though it wasn't an easy one.

"We'll have to give up that idea," Tom remarked rather mournfully. "Without a doubt we could carry the canoe to Lake Pleasant, if we had time enough. But I don't believe we could make five miles a day with it. So to get the canoe up to Lake Pleasant on our shoulders, and then back again would take over two weeks."

Dick was unusually thoughtful as the boys strolled from Driggs' yard up to Main Street. Lake Pleasant was a fine place to visit in summer. He knew that, for he had been there on one occasion.

On one side of the lake were two hotels, each with roomy recreation grounds, with piers and plenty of boats. On this same side there were four or five boarding houses for people of more moderate means.

Boating was the one great pastime at Lake Pleasant. Indeed, a canoe club had been started there by young men of means, and the boathouse stood at the water's edge on the Hotel Pleasant grounds.

Then, too, there may have been another reason for Dick's desire to go to Lake Pleasant. The following week Dr. and Mrs. Bentley were going to take charge of a party of Gridley high school girls, at Lake Pleasant, and Laura and Belle Meade would be of the number.

"We'd cut a fine dash at Lake Pleasant," Dave Darrin laughed. "Which hotel would we honor with our patronage? Terms, from fourteen to twenty-five dollars a week. We've about enough money to stay at one of the hotels for about two hours, or at a boarding house for about nine hours. When shall we start—and how shall we get there with our canoe?"

"We have about fifty dollars in our treasury, from the birch bark business," Dick mused aloud, "but that won't help us any, will it?"

"Why, how much would it cost to have the canoe taken up there on a wagon?" Danny Grin asked.

"Not less than fifteen dollars each way," Dick replied.

"We'll give it up," said Tom. "There's nothing in the Lake Pleasant idea for us."

"I hadn't any idea we could do anything else but give it up," Dave observed, though he spoke rather gloomily.

Dick was still thinking hard, though he could think of no plan that would enable them to make a trip to Lake Pleasant and remain there for some days.

It was a Saturday afternoon. It had been a hot day, yet out on the water, busy with their sport, and acquiring a deep coating of sunburn, the boys had not noticed the heat especially. Now they mopped their faces as they strolled almost listlessly along the street.

"I want to go to Lake Pleasant," grumbled Danny Grin.

"Going to-night, or to-morrow morning?" teased Greg.

"If I had an automobile I'd start after supper," Dalzell informed them.

"But not having a car you'll wait till you're grown up and have begun to earn money of your own," laughed Harry Hazelton.

"What do you say, Dick?" asked Dan Dalzell anxiously.

"I say that I'm going to put in a few days or a fortnight at Lake Pleasant if I can possibly find the way," Dick retorted, with a sudden energy that was quite out of keeping with the heat of the afternoon.

"Hurray!" from Danny Grin.

"That's what I call the right talk," added Darrin.

"How will the rest of us get along with the canoe while you're gone?" questioned Tom Reade.

"You don't suppose I'd go to Lake Pleasant without the rest of the crowd?" Dick retorted rather scornfully.

"Then you're going to take us all with you, and the canoe, too?" Tom demanded, betraying more interest.

"If I can find the way to do it, or if any of you fellows can," was young Prescott's answer.

That started another eager volley of talk. Yet soon all of them save Dick looked quite hopeless.

The railroad ran only within eight miles of

the lake. From the railway station the rest of the journey was usually made by automobile stages, while baggage went up on automobile trucks. Charges were high on this automobile line up into the hills. To send the canoe by rail, and then transfer it to an automobile truck would cost more than to transport it direct from Gridley to the lake by wagon.

"We can talk about it all we want," sighed Tom, "but I don't see the telephone poles on the golden road to Lake Pleasant."

"We've got to find the way if we can," Dick retorted firmly. "Let's all set about it at once."

"When do we start?" teased Tom.

"Monday morning early," laughed Dave. "And this is late Saturday afternoon."

Dan Dalzell was not in his usually jovial spirits. His heart was as much set on going as was Dick's, but Dan now felt that the pleasure jaunt was simply impossible.

"Let's meet on Main Street after supper," Dick proposed. "Perhaps by that time we'll have found an idea or two."

"If we can find a pocketbook or two lying in the Main Street gutter, that will be something more practical than finding ideas," Tom replied with a doleful shake of his head. "But perhaps we'll really find the pocketbooks. Such things are told of in story books, anyway, you know."

"If we find any pocketbooks," smiled Dick, "our first concern after that will be to find the owners of them. So that stunt wouldn't do us much good, even if it happened."

Then the boys separated and went to their respective homes for supper. But Dick Prescott did not eat as much as usual. He was too preoccupied. He knew to a penny the amount that was in the treasury of their little canoe club, for Mr. Prescott was holding the money subject to his son's call. Certainly the money in the treasury wouldn't bring about a vacation at Lake Pleasant.

Just as soon as the meal was over Dick went out, strolling back to Main Street.

" 'Lo, Dick!"

Prescott turned to recognize and nod to a barefooted boy, rather frayed as to attire. Mart Heckler had been two classes below him when Prescott had attended Central Grammar School. Now Mart was waiting for the fall to enter the last grade at Central, which was also to be his last year at school. Mart's parents were poor, and this lad, in another year, must join the army of toilers.

"You must be having a lot of fun this vacation, Dick," remarked Mart rather wistfully. "Lot of fun in that war canoe, isn't there?"

"Yes; there is, Mart. If we see you down

at the float one of these days we'll ask you out for a little ride."

"Will you?" asked Mart, his eyes snapping. "Fine! Now that you fellows have your canoe I don't suppose you'll be trying to go away anywhere this summer. Too much fun at home, eh?"

"I don't know about that," said young Prescott wistfully. "Just now we're planning to try to take the canoe up to Lake Pleasant for a while."

"Bully place, the lake," said Mart approvingly. "I'm going up there Monday. Going to be gone for a couple of days."

"How are you going to get there?" Dick asked with interest.

"You know my Uncle Billy, don't you?" asked Mart. "He's the teamster, you know. He's going to Lake Pleasant to get a load of furniture that the installment folks are taking back from a new boarding house up there. He said I could go up with him. We'll carry our food, and sleep over Monday night in the wagon."

Dick halted suddenly, trembling with eagerness. He began to feel that he had scented a way of getting the canoe up to the lake in the hills!

CHAPTER X

PUTTING UP A BIG SCHEME

"YOUR uncle will be at his regular stand to-night, won't he?" queried Dick Prescott.

"I expect so," Mart agreed. "What's the matter? Do you want to go along with us? I guess Uncle Billy would be willing."

At this moment Dick heard a group of younger boys laughing as they strolled along the street.

Following their glances, Dick saw in the street what is commonly known in small towns as the "hoss wagon"—a vehicle built for the purpose of removing dead horses.

"There goes Fred Ripley's bargain!" chuckled one of the boys.

At that moment Fred Ripley himself turned the corner into Main Street.

"And there's Rip himself," laughed another boy. "Hey, Rip! How's horse flesh?"

But Fred, flushing angrily, hurried along.

"What's up?" asked young Prescott as the group of boys came along.

"Haven't you heard about Fred's pony?" asked one of the crowd.

"I know he bought a pony," Dick answered.

"Yes; but Squire Ripley had a veterinary go down to the Ripley stable this afternoon, and look the pony over," volunteered the ready informant. "Vet said that the pony would be worth a dollar or two for his hide, but wouldn't be worth anything alive. So Squire Ripley ordered the pony shot, and that cart is taking the poor beast away."

"Is your canoe going to be a winner?" asked another boy.

"We expect so," Dick nodded.

"Great joke on Rip, isn't it?" grinned another.

"I can't say that his misfortune makes me especially happy," Prescott answered gravely.

"Well, I'm glad he was 'stung' on his pony," continued the other boy. "Rip is no good!"

"There is an old saying to the effect that, if we got our just deserts we'd all of us be more or less unhappy," smiled Dick.

"Rip won't be so chesty with us smaller boys," predicted another grammar school boy. "If he tries it on, all we've got to do is to ask him, 'How's horse flesh, Rip?' "

In spite of himself Dick could not help laughing at the thought of the mortification of the lawyer's son when he should be teased on so tender a point. Then Dick asked:

"Mart, is your uncle at his stand now?"

"I reckon he is," nodded Heckler.

"Let's go over there and see him."

"You're going to try to take the ride with us, then?" asked Mart.

"I think so."

"Bully!" glowed Mart, who, like most of the younger boys of Gridley, was a great admirer of the leader of Dick & Co.

Billy Heckler, a man of thirty, was, indeed, to be found at his stand.

"Dick wants to go up to Lake Pleasant with us on Monday," Mart began, but Dick quickly added:

"I understand, Mr. Heckler, that you're going up to the lake without a load."

"Yes," nodded the truckman.

"Then it struck me that perhaps I could arrange with you to take up our canoe and some bedding, and also let the fellows ride on the wagon."

"How many of you are there?" inquired Billy Heckler.

"The usual six," Dick smiled. "If you can do it, how much would you charge us?"

"Fifteen dollars," replied the driver, after a few moments' thought.

Dick's face showed his disappointment at the answer.

"I'm afraid that puts us out of it, then," he said quietly. "I had hoped that, as you are going up without a load, anyway, you might be willing to take our outfit up for a few dollars. It would be that much to the good for you, wouldn't it?"

"Hardly," Billy replied. "Carrying a load takes more out of a team than an empty wagon does. You can see that, can't you?"

"Ye-es," Dick nodded thoughtfully. "But, you see, we're only boys, and we can't talk money quite like men yet."

"Some men can't do anything with money except talk about it," Billy Heckler grinned. "Well, I'd like to oblige you boys. What's your offer, then?"

"We don't feel that we could pay more than five dollars," Dick answered promptly.

"No money in that," replied Billy Heckler, picking up a piece of wood and whittling.

"No; I'm afraid there isn't," Dick admitted. "I guess our crowd will have to content itself with staying at home and using the canoe on the river."

"The river is a good place," Heckler argued. "Why aren't you all content to stay at home and use your canoe on the river?"

"Because," smiled young Prescott, "I suppose it's human nature to want to get away

somewhere in the summer. Then we understand that there are other crew canoes on Lake Pleasant. Of course, now we've spent a few days in the canoe, we believe we're real canoe racers."

"If you could call it ten dollars," Heckler proposed after a few minutes, "that might——"

"The crowd hasn't money enough," Dick replied. "You see, we've got to get the canoe back, too. Then we'll have to use money to feed ourselves up there. I don't see how we can go if we have to spend more than five dollars to get there."

Billy Heckler started to shake his head, but Mart, getting behind Dick, made vigorous signals.

"We-ell, I suppose I can do it," agreed Heckler at last. "There's nothing in the job, but I can remember that I used to be a boy myself. We'll call it a deal, then, shall we?"

"I'll have to see the other fellows first," Prescott answered. "I'll hustle, though. The fellows will all have to get permission at home, too, you know."

"Let me know any time before six to-morrow night," proposed Billy. "It must be understood, though, that if I get a paying freight order to haul to the lake between now and

starting time, then my deal with you must be off."

"Of course," Dick agreed. "And thank you, Mr. Heckler. Now, I'll hustle away and see the other fellows."

Dick sped promptly away. When he reached Main Street he found the other fellows there. Dick gleefully detailed the semi-arrangement that he had made.

"Great!" cried Dave.

"Grand, if we can all square matters at home," Tom Reade nodded. "Well, fellows, you all know what we've got to do now. We'll meet again at this same place. All do your prettiest coaxing at home. It spoils the whole thing if anyone of us gets held up from the trip. Did you hear about Rip's pony, Dick?"

"Yes."

"Served him ri——" began Greg Holmes, but stopped suddenly.

For Fred Ripley, turning the corner, saw Dick & Co., and carefully walked around them to avoid having to pass through the little crowd.

"Speaking of angels——!" said Dave Darrin dryly.

"Don't tease him, Darry," urged Dick in a very low voice.

But Fred heard all their remarks. His fists clenched as he walked on with heightened color.

"It's just meat to them to see me so badly sold on the pony, and to know that my father ordered the animal shot and carted away!" muttered young Ripley fiercely. "Of course the whole town knows of it by this time. Prescott's muckers and a few others will be in high glee over my misfortune, but, anyway, I'll have the sympathy of all the decent people in Gridley!"

Fred's ears must have burned that night, however, for the majority of the Gridley boys were laughing over his poor trade in horse flesh.

CHAPTER XI

ALL READY TO RACE, BUT——

ON the landing stage at the Hotel Pleasant a group of girls stood on the following Tuesday morning.

"Wouldn't Dick and Dave and the rest of their crowd enjoy this lake if they were here with their canoe?" asked Laura Bentley.

"Yes," agreed Belle Meade. "And very likely they'd win some more laurels for Gridley High School, too. Preston High School has a six-paddle canoe here now, and Trentville High School will send a canoe crew here in a few days. Oh, how I wish the boys could manage to get here with their war canoe!"

"It seems too bad, doesn't it," remarked Clara Marshall, "that some of the nicest boys in our high school are so poor that they can't do the ordinary things they would like to do?"

"Some of the boys in Dick & Co. won't be poor when they've been out of school ten years," Laura predicted, with a glowing face.

"I don't believe any of them will be poor by that time," agreed Clara. "But it must hurt them a good deal, just now, not to have more money."

"I wish they could be here now," sighed Laura.

"You want to see Gridley High School win more laurels in sports and athletics?" asked another girl.

"Yes," assented Miss Bentley, "and I'd like to see the boys here, anyway, whether they won a canoe race or not."

"There's a crew canoe putting off from the other side now!" announced Belle Meade.

"That's probably Preston High School," said Laura.

"Have the Preston boys a war canoe, too?" asked one of the girls, shading her eyes with her hand, and staring hard at the canoe across the lake, some three quarters of a mile away.

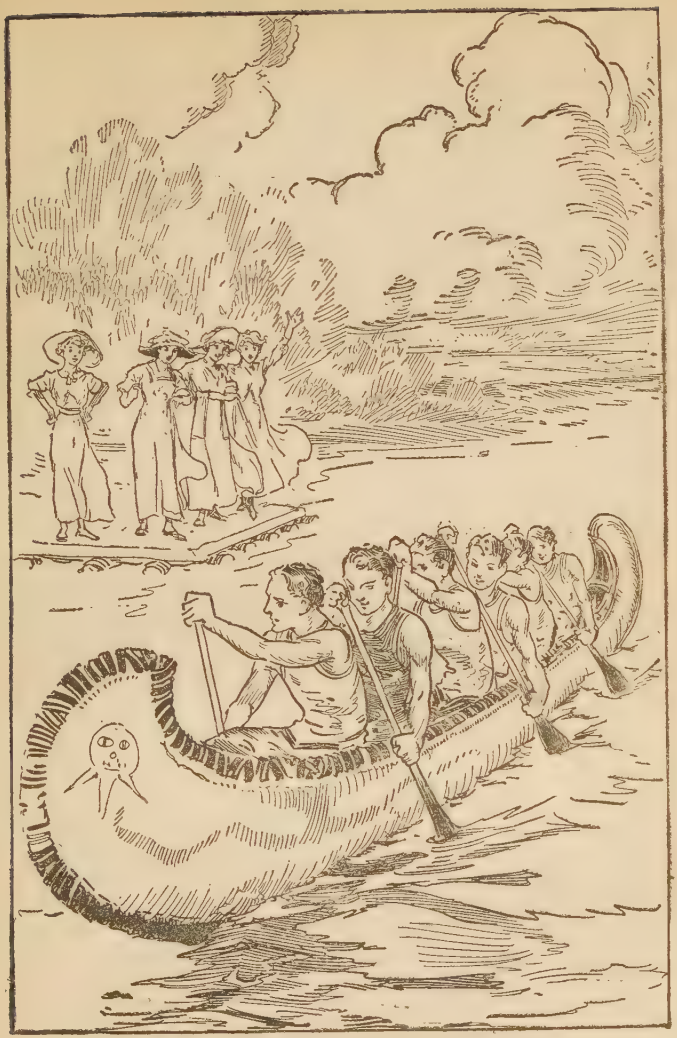
"Someone at the hotel said the Preston boys have a cedar and canvas canoe," Laura replied.

"That's a birch-bark canoe over yonder," declared the girl who was studying the distant craft so intently. "I can tell by the way the sun shines on the wet places along the sides of the canoe."

The other girls were now looking eagerly.

"Wait a moment," begged Clara, and, turning, sped lightly to the boathouse near by. She returned with a telescope.

"Hurry!" begged Laura Bentley as Clara started to focus the telescope.



"Hurrah! Gridley High School!"

"You take it," proposed Clara generously, passing the glass to Laura.

Laura soon had the telescope focused.

"Hurrah, girls!" she cried. "That's the war canoe from Gridley, and Dick & Co. are in it."

She passed the glass to Belle Meade, who took an eager peep through it.

"Hurrah! Gridley High School! Hurrah!" chorused the other girls.

Their voices must have traveled across the water, for Prescott, at the stern of the war canoe, suddenly gave a couple of strokes with his wet, flashing paddle, that swung the prow around, driving the canoe straight in the direction of the landing float.

"Hurrah! Gridley High School! Hurrah!" called the girls again, giving the high school yell of the girls of that institution of learning.

In answer a series of whoops came over the water.

"They're coming at racing speed!" cried Laura.

"Which shows how devoted the boys of our high school are to the young ladies," laughed Belle.

Within a few minutes the canoe was quite close, and coming on swiftly. From the young paddlers went up the vocal volley:

"T-E-R-R-O-R-S-! Wa-ar! Fam-ine! Pes-

ti-lence! That's us! That's us! G-R-I-D-L-E-Y—H. S.! Rah! rah! rah! rah! Gri-i-idley!"

"Hurrah! Gridley! Hurrah!" answered the girls.

"Whoop! Wow! wow! *Whoo-oo-oo-oop!* Indians! Cut-throats! Lunch-robbers! Bad, bad, bad! Speed Club! Glee Club! Canoe Club—Gridley H. S.!" volleyed back Dick & Co.

It was the first time that they had let out their canoe yell in public. They performed it lustily, with zest and pride.

"Splendid!" cried some of the girls, clapping their hands. Though it was not quite plain whether they referred to the new yell, or to the skilful manner in which the boys now brought their craft in. At a single "Ugh!" from Prescott they ceased paddling. Dick, with two or three turns of his own paddle, brought the canoe in gently against the float. Now Dave and Dick held the canoe to the float with their paddles while the other young Indians, one at a time, stepped out. Those who had landed now bent over, holding the gunwale gently while Dave, first, and then Dick, stepped to the float.

"Up with it, braves! Out with it!" cried Dick. The canoe, grasped by twelve hands,

was drawn up on to the float, where its wet hull lay glistening in the bright July sunlight.

"You never told us you were coming up here!" cried Laura Bentley, half reproachfully.

"If you're bored at seeing us," proposed Dick, smilingly, "we'll launch our bark and speed away again."

"Of course we're not bored," protested Belle Meade. "But why couldn't you tell us you were coming?"

"We weren't sure of it until late Sunday afternoon," Dave assured her. "Some of us had to do some coaxing at home before we got permission."

"How did you get that big canoe here?" Clara Marshall asked.

"Don't you see the gasoline engine and the folded white wings inside the canoe?" asked Tom Reade gravely. "We can use it either as a canoe or as an airship."

Three or four of the girls, Clara at their head, stepped forward to look for engine and "wings," then stepped back, laughing.

"You're such a fibber, Tom Reade!" declared Susie Sharp.

"A falsifier?" demanded Tom indignantly. "Nothing like it, Miss Susie! The worst you can say of me is that I have the imagination of an inventor."

"Tweedledum and tweedledee!" laughed Clara.

"It does seem good to see you boys up here," Belle went on with enthusiasm. "How long are you going to stay?"

"In other words, how soon are you going to be rid of us?" asked Danny Grin.

"Are you speaking for yourself, Mr. Dalzell?" Belle returned tartly. "I inquired more particularly about the others."

Dan quite enjoyed the laugh on himself, though he replied quickly:

"The others have to go home when I do. They had to promise that they would do so."

"We have been camping at Lake Pleasant for two days," Dick explained. "We came up here with our canoe and camping outfit on Billy Heckler's wagon. We brought along Harry's bull-dog to watch the camp. As to how long we'll stay, that depends."

"Depends upon what?" Clara asked.

"On how long our funds hold out," Prescott explained, with a frank smile. "You see, all our Wall Street investments have turned out badly."

"I'm truly sorry to hear that young men of your tender age should have been drawn into the snares of Wall Street," retorted Clara dryly.

"So, having had some disappointments in high finance," Prescott went on, "we can stay only as long as our *dog fund* lasts."

"Dog fund?" asked Susie Sharp, looking bewildered.

"Dick is talking about the money we made in bark," Greg Holmes explained readily.

"Then you really expect to be here a fortnight?" Laura asked.

"Yes; if we don't develop too healthy appetites and eat up our funds before the fortnight is over," Dick assented.

"Oh, you mustn't do that," urged Belle.

"Mustn't do what?" Dave asked.

"Don't eat up your funds too quickly," Belle explained.

"Even if you do," suggested Susie Sharp, teasingly, "you won't need to hurry home. We girls know where there are several fine fields of farm truck that can be robbed late at night. Potatoes, corn, watermelons——"

"It's really very nice of you girls to offer to rob the farmers' fields to find provender for us," returned Greg. "But I am afraid that we boys have been too honestly brought up to allow ourselves to become receivers of stolen——"

"Greg Holmes!" Susie Sharp interrupted, her face turning very red.

"No; it's nice of you, of course," Greg went on tantalizingly, "but we'd rather have a short vacation, that we can tell the whole truth about when we go home."

"You boys may starve, if you like," retorted Susie, with a toss of her head. "I'm through with trying to help you out."

"You know, Susie," Danny Grin went on maliciously, "farmers' fields are often guarded by dogs. Just think how you would feel, trying to climb a tree on a dark night, with a bulldog's teeth just two inches from the heels of your shoes."

"Who are up here, in the way of canoe folks?" Dick asked Laura.

She told him about the Preston High School boys and the coming crew from Trentville High School.

"We ought to be able to get up some good races," remarked Dave.

"You'll disgrace Gridley High School, though, unless you drop Danny Grin and Greg Holmes," retorted Susie.

"Now, don't be too hard on us, Miss Sharp," tantalized Greg, "just because we tried to dissuade you from committing a crime with the otherwise laudable intention of feeding us when our money runs out."

"If you will only leave Greg and Dan out,"

proposed Clara, "you may call on any two of us girls that you want to take their places in the canoe on race days."

"Whew!" muttered Dick suddenly.

"What's wrong?" demanded Belle.

"Don't mind Prescott," urged Tom Reade. "Just as we left shore on the other side someone threw a stone into the lake and raised a succession of ripples, which rocked the canoe a bit. So—well, you've all heard of sea sickness, haven't you?"

"We might feel worse than sea sick," Dick went on, "if we had raced, and then suddenly remembered that we have no authorization from Gridley High School to represent the school in sporting events."

Tom's face fell instantly. Dave Darrin, too, looked suddenly very serious.

"What's the matter?" asked Laura anxiously.

"Why, you see," Dick went on, "although we are sure enough Gridley High School boys, we haven't gone through the simple little formality of getting our canoe club recognized by the High School Athletic Council."

"You can race just the same, can't you?" asked Susie Sharp, looking much concerned.

"We may race all we wish, and no one will stop us——"

"Then it's all right," said Susie, with an air of conviction.

"But we simply cannot race in the name of Gridley High School."

"Oh, but that's too bad!" cried Clara.

"You can write to someone in the Council and secure the necessary authorization, can't you?" asked Laura.

"Yes, we can write; but it's another matter to get action by the Council in time," Dick responded. "You see, it's the vacation season. There are seven members of the Athletic Council and I believe that all seven of the members are at present away from Gridley. Likely as not they are in seven different states, and the secretary may not even know where most of them are."

Eight Gridley High School girls suddenly looked anxious. They had been rejoicing in the prospect of "rooting" for a victorious Gridley crew here at Lake Pleasant. Now the whole thing seemed to have fallen flat.

"The thing to do—though it doesn't look very promising—is to——" began Tom Reade, then came to dead stop.

"How provoking you can be, when you want to, Tom," pouted Clara. "Why don't you go on?"

"Because I found myself stuck fast in a new

quagmire of thought," Reade confessed humbly. "What I was about to say is that the first thing to do is to write to Mr. William Howgate, secretary of the Gridley High School Athletic Council of the Alumni Association. But that was where the thought came in and stabbed me with a question mark. Mr. Howgate is out of town. Does anyone here know his address?"

Fourteen Gridley faces looked blank until Dick at last remarked:

"I suppose a letter sent to his address in Gridley would reach him. It would be forwarded."

"Thank goodness for one quick-witted boy in Gridley High School!" uttered Belle. "Of course a letter would be forwarded."

"And there isn't any time to be lost, either," urged Susie. "Girls, we'll take Dick right up to the hotel now, and sit and watch him while he writes and mails that letter."

"Right!" came a prompt chorus.

"Come along, boys," added Susie, as the girls started away with their willing captive.

"Let Dave go," spoke up Tom. "Some of us must stay behind and stand by our canoe. It's valuable—to us!"

So Darrin was shoved forward. He and Prescott had walked a few yards when the latter stopped in sudden dismay.

"What's the matter?" asked Clara.

"We are dressed all right for our own camp," Dick replied, glancing down at his flannel shirt, old trousers and well-worn pair of canvas "sneakers" on his feet. "We didn't feel out of place in the canoe, either. But the hotel is a fashionable place, and we can't go up in this sort of rig, to discredit you girls. For that matter, just think how smart you all look yourselves, dressed in the daintiest of summer frocks. While we look like—well, I won't say the word."

"If our Gridley boys are ashamed to be seen with us just because they're in rough camp attire," said Laura gently, "then we haven't as much reason to be proud of them as we thought we had."

"I'm answered," Dick admitted humbly. "Lead on, then. We'll take comfort from our company, and hold our heads as high as we can."

On to the wide hotel porch, where many well-dressed people sat, the girls conducted the two delegates from the canoe club. However, none of the guests on the porch paid any particular attention to Dick and Dave. Both campers and canoers were common enough at this summer resort.

It was Clara who led the way into a parlor,

in one corner of which there was a writing desk. Dick seated himself at the desk, and after a moment's thought began to write, then promptly became absorbed in his task. Dave and the girls seated themselves at a little distance, chatting in low tones.

There were other guests of the Hotel Pleasant in the parlor, while still others passed in or out from time to time.

One young man, quite fashionably dressed, stepped into the parlor, looked about him, then started as his glance fell on Dick and Dave.

It was Fred Ripley.

"Hello!" muttered Ripley in a voice just loud enough to carry, as he stood looking at Dick and Dave. "I thought I saw, out in the grounds, a sign that read: 'No tramps, beggars or peddlers allowed on these grounds or in the hotel.'"

Dick's fingers trembled so that he dropped the pen, though he tried to conceal his feelings.

Dave Darrin's fists clenched tightly, though he had the good sense to realize that to start a fight in the parlor was out of the question.

Ripley's remark had been loud enough to attract the attention of nearly every person in the big room toward Dick and Dave.

CHAPTER XII

SUSIE DISCOMFITS A BOOR

LAURA BENTLEY bit her lips. She flushed, then started to rise, but Susie Sharp gently pushed her back into her seat, then crossed to an electric button in the frame of a window.

A bell-boy promptly answered Susie's ring.

"Will you kindly ask the manager to come here at once?" asked Susie.

As it happened, the manager was no further away than the corridor. He came in quickly, bowing.

"Mr. Wright," asked Susie coldly, nodding toward Fred Ripley, who stood leaning over a chair, smiling insolently, "will you kindly have this objectionable person removed? He is annoying our guests."

In a twinkling Fred's insolent smile vanished. Susie's request had not been voiced in a loud tone, but it had been heard by perhaps twenty-five strangers in the parlor.

Ripley's face paled, briefly, then became fiery red. He stood erect, stammered inarticulately, then looked as though he were furtively seeking some hiding place.

"I think, Miss Sharp," replied the hotel manager, with another bow, "that the young man is on the point of leaving, and that the services of a porter will not be needed."

Fred tried to look unconcerned; he fished mentally for something smart to say. For once, however, his self assurance had utterly deserted him.

"Oh—well!" he muttered, then turned and left the parlor in the midst of a deep silence that completed his utter humiliation.

"Mr. Wright," said Laura, "I want you to know Mr. Darrin, one of our most popular high school boys in Gridley. Dick, can't you come over here a moment? Mr. Wright, Mr. Prescott. Our two friends, Mr. Wright, have brought up a racing canoe. They are camping across the lake. We hope they will arrange for races with the Preston and Trentville High School Canoe Clubs."

"I am most glad to meet your friends," said the manager, shaking hands with Dick and Dave. "Two of the Preston High School young men are stopping here in the house, and the others are over at the Lakeview House. I hope, Mr. Prescott, that we shall be able to have some fine high school races. It will increase the gayety of the season here."

"Thank you," said Dick. "But I am afraid,

sir, that we have been worse than neglectful—stupid."

"How so?" asked Mr. Wright, his manner quickly putting both rather shabby-looking boys wholly at their ease.

"Why, sir," Prescott explained, "we had never thought, until this morning, to secure authorization from the Athletic Council of our school to represent Gridley High School. I am now engaged in writing a letter asking for that authorization."

"Let me take a hand in this," begged Mr. Wright. "Is your letter at all of a private nature?"

"Not in the least, sir."

"May I see it?"

"Certainly, Mr. Wright."

The hotel manager followed Dick to the writing desk, where he glanced over the letter.

"I have only one suggestion to make," said the manager. "Why not ask the secretary, Mr. Howgate, to send his answer by telegraph to this hotel, collect?"

"That would be all right," agreed Dick frankly, "if his answer isn't too long, or if he doesn't have to send more than one telegram. We are not exactly overburdened with funds, Mr. Wright."

"That doesn't cut any figure at all," replied

the hotel manager in a voice so low that none but Prescott heard him. "Any telegrams sent here for you will be paid for by the hotel. There will be no expense to you, Mr. Prescott."

"I'm afraid I don't understand why you should do this, Mr. Wright," said Dick, looking at the other attentively.

"Purely a matter of business, my boy," the hotel manager beamed down at him. "Such racing as I hope to have here on Lake Pleasant constitutes a summer season attraction. Arrange a schedule of races, and you may be sure that both hotels will advertise the fact. It will be enough to draw a lot of young people here, and this hotel thrives by the number of guests that it entertains. So will you do me the favor of asking your Mr. Howgate to telegraph his answer—collect—addressing it here?"

That began to look like something that Prescott could understand. He called Dave over to him and told his chum what was being discussed.

"Fine!" glowed Darrin. "Thank you, Mr. Wright."

So Dick made the suggested addition to the letter. After he addressed an envelope and had sealed it the manager took the letter away to mail. Then he returned to say, with a tactfulness that won the hearts of the eight Gridley High School girls:

"Mr. Prescott, you and your friends will oblige me if you will make this hotel your headquarters when you are on this side of the lake. We shall always be delighted to see you here."

Thanking the manager for his courtesy, Dick and Dave accompanied Laura to the porch, where they were introduced to some of the other guests. Then the two boys and the girls started down to the lakeside once more.

"Mr. Wright was very kind," murmured Dick gratefully.

"He never fails in courtesy toward anyone," replied Laura. "You boys will come over every day, won't you? We must have a picnic or two."

"And you must all visit our camp," Dick urged. "It isn't much of a place, but the welcome will be of the real Gridley kind. If you dare take the risk, we'll even offer you a camp meal."

"The farmers' gardens are in danger, after all, then," laughed Susie. "If you are going to deplete your larders to entertain us, we girls will surely rob the farmers to make up for what we eat."

Susie's face had grown so grave that Prescott could not help regarding her quizzically.

"I mean just what I say about robbing the farmers, don't I, girls?" Susie asked.

"Yes," agreed Laura Bentley promptly. She had no idea what was passing in her friend's head, but she knew Susie well enough to feel sure that the latter was planning nothing very wicked.

"Can't we take you out, two at a time?" proposed Dick, as the young people neared the float.

"Now?" inquired Laura.

"Yes; since 'now' is always the best time for doing things," Prescott replied.

In no time at all the plan had been agreed to. Clara and Susie went out for the first ride in the canoe, Tom Reade taking command, while Dick and Dave remained on the float.

Two at a time the girls were taken out on the water. This consumed nearly two hours of time altogether, but it was thoroughly enjoyed by every member of the party.

But at last it came close, indeed, to the luncheon hour.

"Now, when are you coming over to that picnic in our camp?" Dick asked in an outburst of hospitality.

"At what time of the day?" Laura inquired.

"If your mother and Mrs. Meade will come along as chaperons," Dick answered, "night would be the best time."

"Why at night?"

"Because, then, you wouldn't be able to see the shabby aspect of our camp so plainly."

"It would be very jolly to go over and have a picnic meal by the campfire," Belle agreed. "Yet, in that case, we would want to reach your place by half-past four or so in the afternoon."

"Why?"

"So that we girls may have the fun of helping prepare a famous feast," Miss Meade went on. "Boys, if we come, we shall pass luncheon by and bring keen appetites for that evening feast. What is the principal item on the bill of fare of your camp?"

"Canned goods," replied Tom Reade.

"Don't you believe him," Dick interjected quickly. "Lake trout, bass and perch. This lake is well stocked, and we have already found one splendid fishing hole. We got up at five this morning and caught so many fish in half an hour that we threw some of them back into the water because we had no ice."

"Will your mothers come, if we have it in the evening?" asked Dick looking at Laura and Belle.

"Surely," nodded Laura quickly.

"And we'll greatly enjoy it," Dick went on, "if Dr. Bentley will also come. Is your father here, Miss Meade?"

"I'm sorry to say that he isn't," Belle an-

swered. "A real picnic, in real woods, beside real water, would appeal to him strongly."

"But we haven't fixed upon the date," cried Susie impatiently.

"How would to-morrow night do?" Dick suggested.

"Famously," Laura replied. "Now, boys, you catch the fish to-morrow afternoon, and don't bother so much about the other things to eat. We won't have any canned stuff in our famous feast. We girls will bring all the garden stuff."

"And will steal it from the farmers, at that," added Susie teasingly.

"Yes, you will!" mocked Danny Grin good-humoredly.

"I give you our word that we'll steal everything that we bring in the garden line," Susie declared vigorously.

"Then you'll arrange it with the farmer in advance," Greg laughed.

"I give you our word that we won't do that, either," laughed Laura, coming to her friend's support, though she had no idea what was passing in Susie's busy little head.

"There goes the luncheon bell!" cried Dick reproachfully. "We're keeping you girls away from your meal. Come on, fellows. Into the canoe with you."

"But you'll be back here to-morrow morning?" pressed Miss Bentley.

"Yes; at what time?"

"Ten o'clock."

"You'll find us here punctually."

Dick & Co. paddled back to their camp feeling that they were having a most jolly time, with all the real fun yet to come.

Dick did not think it worth while to go over to the hotel again that day, to see if a telegram had come. He was certain that the letter would not find Mr. Howgate earlier than the next day, in any event.

But at ten o'clock the next morning Dick & Co., having put the best possible aspect on their attire, paddled gently in alongside the float of the Hotel Pleasant.

Even before they had landed, Fred Ripley, who was stopping with his father and mother at the Lakeview House, alighted from an automobile runabout in the woods some two hundred yards from the lakeside camp of Dick & Co.

"Those muckers are away," Fred told himself, as he watched the war canoe go in at the hotel float. "Now, if I have half as much ingenuity as I sometimes think I have, I believe I can cut short their stay here by rendering that cheap crowd homeless—and foodless!"

CHAPTER XIII

THE RIPLEY HEIR TRIES COAXING

FRED studied the now distant canoe, then glanced carefully about the camp.

He knew that any sign of his presence, observed by Dick & Co., would be sure to result in the swift return of the canoe, with its load of six indignant boys.

Nor did young Ripley dare to risk discovery as the perpetrator of the outrage he was now planning. He feared his father's certain wrath.

"There are screens of bushes behind which I can operate," Ripley decided. "I am glad of the bushes, for, if I use care, not a living soul can see me. Now, for some swift work."

It did not take Ripley long to discover where the boys' food supply was stored.

"These fellows act like boobs!" muttered Fred in disgust. "Here they go away and leave everything exposed. If they didn't have an enemy in the world, even then some tramp could come along and clean out the camp. Humph! Two tramps, if they wanted to work for a little while, could carry away all the food there is here. What a lot of poor, penniless muckers Prescott and his friends are!"

Again Fred studied the lay of the land, then drew off his coat and flung it aside.

"Now, to work!" he said to himself gleefully.

First of all, he got the food supplies all together. Most of this stuff was in the form of canned goods. Ripley gathered it up in one big pile.

Then he stepped over to the tent, from which, at several points and angles he looked carefully over to the hotel landing float on the other side of Lake Pleasant.

"They can't see, from the hotel, whether the tent is down or up," Fred determined. "So here goes!"

Opening the largest blade of his pocketknife, Fred cut one of the guy-ropes. He passed around the tent, cutting each one in turn, until the canvas shelter fell over in a white mass.

"Won't they be sore, though?" laughed Fred maliciously, as he started to carry off the camp supplies.

Gr-r-r-r-r! Gr-r-r-r!

Just as Fred was straightening up to start off with his load for a bush-screen near the lake front, Ripley heard that ominous growl. There was also the sound of something moving through the bushes.

As Fred turned his face blanched.

"Harry Hazelton's bull-dog!" he quivered,

now utterly frightened as he caught sight of the gleaming teeth in that ugly muzzle. "I didn't know that they had brought that beast with them. It's the lake for mine! If I can only get into the water I can swim faster than the dog!"

All this flashed through his mind in an instant. Young Ripley started in full flight.

Close behind him, bounding savagely, came the bull-dog, Towser!

Trip! Fred's foot caught in a root. Crying out in craven fright, Fred Ripley plunged to the ground.

There was no time to rise. Towser, growling angrily, was upon him with a bound.

Gr-r-r-r-r!

Fred, with a shriek, felt the dog's teeth in the back of his shirt.

"Get out, you beast!" begged young Ripley in a faint voice.

Gr-r-r-r! was all the answer. Plainly the dog liked the taste of that shirt, for he held to it tightly.

"Get away—please do!" faltered Fred in a broken voice. "Get away. Don't bite. Nice doggie! Nice, nice doggie! Please let go!"

Gr-r-r-r-r!

But Towser didn't attempt to bite as yet. For a bull-dog, and considering how fully he

was master of the field at present, Towser displayed amazing good nature. Only when young Ripley moved did the four-footed policeman of the camp utter that warning growl.

"Nice doggie!" coaxed Fred pleadingly. "Good old fellow!"

To this bit of rank flattery Towser offered no reply. It began to look as though he would be quite satisfied if only his captive made no effort to get away.

"Wouldn't I like to be on my feet, with a shotgun in my hands!" gritted Fred.

"Gr-r-r-r," replied Towser, as though he were an excellent reader of human minds.

For a few moments Fred lay utterly quiet, save for the trembling that he could not control.

During those same moments Towser made himself more comfortable by shifting himself so that he lay with his paws across Fred's left shoulder-blade. His teeth remained firmly fastened in Ripley's shirt.

"Now, how long are you going to stay here, you beast?" glared Fred Ripley, though he did not dare emphasize his displeasure by stirring. It was an instance in which his own displeasure amounted to infinitely less than that of the dog.

Over at the hotel Dick Prescott was reading this telegram to his chums:

"Letter received. Am communicating with other members of Council. Will let you know when I have word. Signed Howgate."

"Oh, you'll get your authorization all right," Laura declared cheerily. "It's only a matter of form."

Laura did not tell something she knew—to the effect that at her request Dr. Bentley had wired Mr. Howgate, urging that the permission be granted to the boys to race as a high school organization.

"May we take you young ladies out in the canoe this morning?" Dick inquired.

"Only a few of us, or for very short, trips," Laura replied. "The fact is, we girls are to play hostess to you this noon."

"Hostess?" asked Dave, looking puzzled.

"Yes; we are going to be your hostesses at luncheon," Laura smiled.

"But I thought you girls were going to skip luncheon in favor of the picnic meal to-night."

"Wait until you boys see the luncheon," laughed Susie Sharp, "and you'll be sure to think we might as well have skipped that meal. It will be light and shadowy, I promise you. Toast, lettuce salad, moonbeam soup, sprites' cake, feather pudding and ghost fruit."

"Won't there be some dog biscuit?" asked Danny Grin hopefully.

"You shall have a special plate," Susie promised.

So the canoe was hauled up on the float and left there, and a general chat followed.

At noon, Dr. Bentley joined the young people, talking with them pleasantly, after which he led the way to the hotel.

There, in a little private dining room, the boys met Mrs. Bentley and Mrs. Meade. The luncheon was soon after served.

It was a dainty meal, though far more elaborate than Susie had led the boys to expect.

At the end of the meal a waiter, looking duly solemn, presented at Danny Grin's elbow a plate holding three dog biscuits.

"Thank you," said Dan Dalzell politely. "But I shall keep them for future use."

Very calmly, notwithstanding Dick's slight frown, Dan placed the biscuit in his coat pockets, though some of the girls found it hard indeed not to giggle.

After the meal the party adjourned to the lawn under the shade of some fine old elms. A little later a farm wagon, drawn by a pair of horses, stopped near the group.

"Now, you must excuse us, boys," announced Laura, rising with a mysterious air. "We girls have a little errand to perform. We shall be back before half-past four o'clock."

"Wouldn't it be better to be back a good deal before that time?" urged Dick. "You see, we can't carry more than three passengers at once, and we are to have eleven guests to ferry across the lake."

"Why, didn't I tell you?" asked Laura, looking astonished. "My father said it would be an imposition to ask you boys to make four round trips this afternoon, and as many more to-night, so he has engaged one of the hotel launches to take us over, and to call for us this evening. You don't mind, do you, boys? But we would like to have you here at half-past four o'clock to go across the lake with us."

"We'll be here," Dick promised promptly.

Six high school boys watched the girls drive off in the farm wagon, waving handkerchiefs and parasols back to the boys.

"Two o'clock," remarked Dick, looking at his watch. "Suppose we take a spin up the lake?"

"Or go back to camp, to make it more ship shape?" suggested Tom Reade.

"What's the use?" inquired Prescott. "We fixed everything as well as we could before leaving there this morning. As to the safety of the camp, Harry's dog, Towser, can be depended upon to look after that."

So Dick & Co. headed up the lake in their canoe.

CHAPTER XIV

THE LIAR HAS A LIE READY

"THAT'S an odd sight, over yonder," announced Dave, pointing shoreward with his paddle.

They were now nearly three miles above the hotel landing. They had entered a section of the country given over to truck gardening.

"Women gathering in the produce," said Dick, after a glance.

"I don't like that," uttered Dave in disgust. "I thought we had progressed too far, and had become too civilized. Years ago I know that women used to work in the fields, but I thought we were above that sort of thing."

"Perhaps the farmer's sons were all girls," suggested Danny Grin.

"I don't like it, anyway," retorted Dave.

"Nor I," agreed Tom. "To have women at work in the fields makes it appear as though the men are too lazy."

The sight on shore was not interesting enough to claim long attention, so the young canoeists proceeded on their way.

At a little after four o'clock, however, they were back at the landing.

Not long after, eight young women were sighted riding along in a farm wagon, while Dr. and Mrs. Bentley and Mrs. Meade strolled down one of the paths.

The wagon reached the pier first, just as a launch in charge of one of the hotel employés came puffing out of a boathouse near by.

"Come here, boys, and help us unload the wagon," called Susie Sharp.

Dick & Co. sprang in answer to her summons.

"Why, what on earth have you here?" demanded Dave, opening his eyes wide as he saw the contents of the wagon.

There were dozens of ears of corn, a sack of new potatoes, cucumbers, tomatoes, a dozen big watermelons and a bushel of early summer apples.

"Sh!" warned Laura mysteriously. "Didn't we promise you we'd rob some farmer for the feast? Did you think that boys are the only ones who can go foraging for a country picnic?"

"You girls didn't go foraging—did you?" gasped Dick Prescott.

"We surely did," retorted Susie Sharp. "Didn't we say we would do so? And doesn't all this stuff prove it?"

"Then you paid the farmer for it," guessed Tom Reade wisely.

"We didn't do any such thing," Miss Sharp insisted. "Did we, girls?"

Seven other young feminine heads shook in vigorous denial.

"We didn't pay the farmer, and we didn't make any arrangement with him," said Laura quietly, her eyes twinkling with mischief. "We simply drove out along the road until we came to the field, and——"

"——ravaged it," supplemented Belle Meade demurely. "We went through that field like war, famine and pestilence combined!"

"Hurry!" called Susie peremptorily.

So the boys made haste with the vegetables and fruit, transferring everything to the bow of the launch, where it was neatly stacked.

"What do you think of that?" Tom demanded of Dick in a whisper at the first opportunity.

"The girls are chaffing us," Dick answered knowingly. "Stole the stuff, did they? That is, stole it in earnest? Nonsense! They're too nice girls for that! But I guess even nice girls, like some decent fellows, find enjoyment, once in a while, in making believe they are doing something desperate. Of course they didn't really steal this stuff."

"If they did," muttered Tom, "they'd be the kind of girls we wouldn't want to know."

"It's all right," Dick assured him. "Sooner or later the truth of this joke of theirs will all come out. There are no finer girls in the country than they."

By this time the older people had joined them. Dr. Bentley's party embarked in the launch, taking up all the room there was.

"Pass us your bow-line, and we can just as well give you boys a tow," proposed the doctor. "There is no use in your paddling."

"Thank you very much, sir," Dick answered, "but paddling is just the fun for which we bought this canoe. We do it because we like it. And we'll show you how fast we can get across the lake."

With a toot of the whistle the launch started. Dick gave the word to his chums. At first the canoe, even under moderate paddling, went ahead of the launch, though gradually the launch drew up.

"You boys look as if you were working," called Dr. Bentley.

"We're doing very little work, sir," Dave answered. "We could make the canoe go faster than this, but it would hardly do to run ahead of our guests."

In truth the canoe slipped rapidly through the water with the expenditure of only a moderate amount of energy on the part of Dick & Co.

In a few minutes the lake had been crossed. A point was found at which the launch could be backed in. By this time the boys were on shore, their canoe hauled up, and they stood ready to help their guests ashore.

"We've landed a little below the camp," said Dick, "but it won't take us more than a minute to walk there. After we've taken you into the camp we'll return for the garden truck."

Gr-r-r-r-r! came a warning sound through the bushes.

"Towser!" spoke Harry Hazelton sharply. "I'm ashamed of you!"

"You ought to be!" came the answer in another voice, and a surly one, at that.

"Fred Ripley?" muttered Dick. "What on earth can he be doing here?"

Unconsciously all of the picnickers hastened their steps. Then they came upon a truly ludicrous sight.

Fred lay where he had been lying ever since ten o'clock that morning. He was coatless, stretched out face downward, with Towser still camped across his shoulder, and the dog's teeth still fastened in his shirt.

"Come and call this measly dog off!" ordered Fred, in a surly tone. "This is a fine reward that I get for trying to do you fellows a friendly turn!"

Towser Was Camped Across Ripley's Shoulder.

Dick, Dave and Tom were the first to get within range and obtain a glimpse of the extraordinary scene. They halted, gasping, though their glances swiftly took in the whole affair. They comprehended what Ripley had been doing, and how the dog had come upon the marauder.

By this time the other members of the party came in sight. Fred still lay on the ground, scowling and fuming over his undignified position, while Towser still kept an eye open for business.

"Call this dog off!" Fred ordered again.

"How did the dog happen to catch you here?" Dick asked quietly.

"Call this dog off and I'll tell you," snapped Fred. "I was trying to do you fellows a good turn, but the dog had to interfere and get hold of the wrong party."

"You were trying to do us a good turn?" gasped Dick wonderingly.

"Yes—but it will be the last time, unless you call this dog off," snarled young Ripley.

Perhaps it is hardly necessary to say that not one in the party believed Fred's extraordinary story.

"Hazelton, get this dog of yours away, or I'll go to court and secure an order to have the beast shot!" snapped young Ripley.

But at this moment another voice was heard calling from the roadway:

"Fred! Fred! Are you there?"

It was Squire Ripley's voice, though the lawyer himself could not be seen as yet.

"Yes, sir; your son is here," Dick answered. "Come and see just how he is here!"

"Get your dog off quickly, Hazelton!" urged Fred.

But Harry, at a slight sign from Dick, didn't stir or open his mouth to call off his dog.

Through the brush came the sound of hurried steps. Then Lawyer Ripley stepped into the group.

"Fred, what on earth does this mean?" demanded the lawyer, staring hard.

"That's just what we thought you might like to find out, sir," Dick replied. "We've been away from camp all day, and just came back to this scene, Mr. Ripley. You are something of an expert in the matter of evidence, sir. Will you kindly tell us what you make out of this? There is our tent cut down. There are all of our food supplies in a pile, except what you see scattered about on the ground. Your son appears to have been headed for the lake when our dog overtook him and pinned him down. As a lawyer, Mr. Ripley, what would you conclude from the evidence thus presented?"

"Call that dog away!" ordered Mr. Ripley.

"Willingly, sir," Dick agreed, "now that you have had opportunity to look into all the evidence that we found. Harry, will you do the honors?"

Smiling slightly, Hazelton stepped forward to speak to Towser. That four-footed guardian of the camp displayed some resentment at first over the idea of letting go of Fred's shirt. After a little, however, Hazelton succeeded in getting his dog away and tied to a tree.

Fred rose to his feet, his face fiery red while he trembled visibly.

"What is the meaning of this, young man?" demanded Lawyer Ripley.

"The meaning," choked the lawyer's son wrathfully, "is just this: I was coming by this place this morning in the runabout, when I heard a good deal of coarse laughter down here. I knew the voices weren't those of boys, and so I knew that something must be up. I got out of the car and came over here. I saw two tramps in the camp. They had already cut down the tent, and when I arrived they were planning to cart the food away. Then they saw me as I stepped forward. I told them what I thought of them for thieving in such fashion. Then the tramps got ready to jump on me and thrash me. Just as I raised my hands

to defend myself this dog came bounding out of the woods and the tramps ran away. Having no more sense than any other fool dog, the cur pinned me down and held me here."

"All day?" asked his father.

"Yes; I've been a prisoner here for hours," quavered Fred. "And now these fellows want to make out, before the high school friends of mine," nodding toward the girls, "that I was the thief and destroyer."

"That story is straightforward enough," commented the lawyer, turning to the others rather stiffly. "Do any of you wish to challenge it?"

No one spoke.

"I'll tell you what I wish, father," broke in Fred angrily. "I want an order from the court to have that dog seized and shot. He's a vicious and dangerous brute!"

"I think such a court order will be easily obtained," replied Mr. Ripley frigidly.

Harry Hazelton turned pale, clenching his fists, though he had the good sense not to speak just then. The other boys all looked highly concerned.

"Were you bitten by the dog?" asked Dr. Bentley quietly.

"I—I don't know yet," replied Fred. "I can't tell."

"Mr. Ripley," said Dr. Bentley very quietly, "if you contemplate seeking a court order for having the dog shot, then I suggest that you permit me to take the young man aside and examine him. I am a physician, with a good many years of practice behind me, and any court would pronounce me competent to testify as to whether your son has been bitten, and, if so, to what extent."

"I don't choose to be examined here," Fred declared sulkily. "If I want anything of that sort done our own physician can do it."

"Young man," replied Dr. Bentley, "your father is an eminent lawyer. He is therefore qualified to inform you that if you decline an examination now as to the presence or absence of injuries on your body, your refusal would have to be taken into account in contested court action for the death of the dog."

"Dr. Bentley is quite right, and he has stated the matter accurately," replied Mr. Ripley. "Fred, do you desire to be examined now? If so, we can go away to some secluded spot with the doctor, and with the dog's owner and any other witness desired."

"I don't want to do anything now but to get away from here," replied Fred sulkily. "I want to be rid of Prescott and his friends as soon as possible."

"Very good, then," nodded his father. "You may do as you like, but if you refuse Dr. Bentley's suggestion for an immediate examination you will stand no chance of securing an order dooming the dog."

Fred's further answer was an angry snort as he turned away. His father lingered to say:

"If your suspicions that my son was here improperly are anywhere near correct, then you are entitled to my most hearty apology. Fred is a peculiar and high-strung boy, but I believe his impulses are right in the main. I will add that I believe his account of how he came to be in this strange plight. He took the car early this morning. I am just returning from a spin in our larger automobile. I saw my runabout at the edge of the road and it occurred to me to stop and see if my son were here. Is there anything more to be said about my son's peculiar experience here?"

"Nothing, thank you, Mr. Ripley," replied Dr. Bentley, after a sidelong glance at Dick.

"Then I will bid you all good afternoon," replied Squire Ripley, raising his hat to the women.

Dr. Bentley watched the lawyer out of sight, then turned to Hazelton with a smile.

"Harry," remarked the physician, "your dog won't be shot by order of the court."

CHAPTER XV

AT THE GREATEST OF FEASTS

IT proved a glorious affair, that picnic by the edge of the lake.

Tom and Dan took Clara and Susie out in the canoe to watch them as they fished.

The other four boys fell to with a will, reeving in new guy ropes and erecting the tent again.

Then firewood was gathered in armfuls and several campfires started.

Just before dark the canoe came in with a cargo of nearly four dozen fish.

These Tom and Dan took to one side and quickly cleaned. Just as Dick and Dave were beginning to realize with some embarrassment that they had nowhere near enough dishes for such an affair, the man from the launch appeared with two baskets of dishes. He then brought up three folding tables and proceeded to set them up, next bringing on campstools. Dr. Bentley had overlooked nothing. Last of all paper lanterns were strung from the trees, and just at dark these were lighted.

Potatoes were set to boil in a kettle. Embers were raked down and corn still in the husks

was set in the embers and covered up to roast. Some of the girls sliced more tomatoes than the whole party could eat. Cucumbers, too, were prepared.

Fish were broiled on grates over the fires. All was ready just before dark.

Dick gave the launch man a hearty invitation to join them at supper, the latter shaking his head, expressed his thanks and hurried away.

What an appetizing meal it was! Nothing seemed to have gone wrong. It was a merry party indeed that sat down around the tables.

Suddenly there came an interruption.

"Camp! Oh, I say—camp!" called a gruff voice from the road.

"Here!" called Dick, rising from the table. "Who is it?"

"Any girls there?" demanded the same voice.

"Several," Dick acknowledged.

"Having a picnic, are you?" demanded the strange voice.

"The best ever!" Dick replied heartily.

"Lots of fresh vegetables, too, eh?"

"Ye-es," Dick assented slowly, and with a peculiar feeling. He recalled the laughing talk of the girls about "stealing," and now wondered what was about to happen.

"I guess they're the girls I want, then," continued the voice of the unseen speaker.

Dick & Co. felt a swift spasm of uneasiness, for that voice sounded as though it might belong to the law.

A moment later a roughly dressed man moved down into the circle of light.

"My name is Dobson," announced the newcomer, looking hard at the girls. "I reckon you were in my truck garden this afternoon, weren't you?"

"Why—er—ye-es," admitted Laura, the first to find her voice. She rose and faced Mr. Dobson with a look of budding uneasiness.

"Took a lot of my vegetables, didn't you?" pressed the farmer.

"Ye-es," faltered Laura, "but——"

"Excuse me, miss, but there aren't many kinds of 'buts' about a transaction of that kind," insisted the farmer.

Here Dr. Bentley, who had looked less concerned than anyone else present, broke in:

"Your name is Dobson?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Not Gibson, then?" pressed the doctor.

"Course my name isn't Gibson, if it's Dobson," retorted the farmer. "There is a man named Gibson who lives 'bout a quarter of a mile from my place."

"Then I imagine I shall have to take you one side and have a little conversation with you,"

smiled the doctor, rising. "Will you follow me?"

The farmer nodded without speaking and the two men walked away.

Ten minutes later Dr. Bentley returned to the young people.

"I appeased the farmer's wrath," he announced, with a laugh. "And now, young ladies, if my judgment is worth anything, I think it is about time to let the cat out of the bag."

Eight high school girls flushed and looked rather confused.

"Why, has anything wrong been going on?" inquired Mrs. Bentley anxiously, while Mrs. Meade waited breathlessly for the reply.

"Nothing extremely wrong," replied Dr. Bentley. "I will explain what happened. Some of these young ladies, having heard that boys occasionally rob orchards or gardens for a feast, laughingly promised the young hosts of this evening that they would steal the necessary vegetables for to-night's supper. Now, while some boys may sometimes do such things, it is needless to add that no boy with a good home and a mother's training is likely to become engaged in such petty pilfering. I don't believe the boys for a moment credited the girls with any real stealing."

"We didn't," spoke up Dick promptly. "We knew there was a string to the joke somewhere."

"These young ladies consulted me," went on Dr. Bentley. "Of course they wanted the whole matter kept very quiet, and they made me promise secrecy. I told them that I didn't like their plan at all, but they coaxed, and I will admit that I yielded to their coaxing very much against my best judgment. They wanted to be able to say that they hadn't paid the farmer, or made any arrangement whatever with him. That much is true. They didn't approach the farmer—they sent me. I went to Farmer Gibson and made the arrangement with him for the supplies, paying him in advance a fair price for whatever the young ladies would take out of his garden. Yet, in spite of my care in the matter, and my very explicit directions to them, it seems that they went astray, and descended upon the truck garden of Mr. Dobson, instead of that of Mr. Gibson. Mr. Dobson, not having received any pay, very naturally objected to being looted of his vegetables while Mr. Gibson received the money. But I have been able to explain matters in a satisfactory manner to Mr. Dobson, and have sent him on his way."

Eight very crestfallen high school girls listened to this recital. The boys, had they not

felt a manly sympathy for their discomfited friends, would have laughed outright.

"I am glad that it is no worse," said Mrs. Bentley in a relieved voice. "At the same time, it was a very silly performance."

"It was," nodded the doctor, who turned to the girls to add:

"My dears, as you succeeded this time in making me your very reluctant accomplice, I am in no position to say very much to you. But I trust you all realize the situation and its outcome, and that you will never allow yourselves to be made ridiculous again in any such way."

"I don't believe we shall," Laura replied. "We felt ashamed of ourselves afterwards, but we were silly enough to feel because we had pledged ourselves to forage for fruit and vegetables that the joke must be carried out."

"Tom Reade," snapped Susie Sharp, "you are just bursting with laughter that you can hardly hold back."

"Not I!" Tom denied promptly. "I am congratulating myself that we boys had sense enough not to take seriously your claim that you had been robbing anyone's garden. As it happened, you did that very thing, but you didn't know it, and you didn't mean to."

There was an embarrassed silence. Then Dick proposed:

"Let's have a good-natured laugh all around and forget the whole thing."

That relieved the awkwardness of the situation. After that a watermelon was cut and brought to the tables.

"Gridley, ahoy!" called a voice across the dark waters.

"Who's there?" called Dick.

"Preston High School Canoe Club. May we visit your camp?"

"Shall I invite them over?" asked Dick, looking at Mrs. Bentley and then at the girls.

Receiving their consent, he called out:

"Come in, Preston High School! Welcome!"

A soft splashing of paddles showed where the visitors were coming in to shore. Dan Dalzell taking the camp lantern, ran to meet them.

A moment later six Preston lads were stepping ashore, one after the other. Dick, having excused himself at table, came forward also to greet them.

Two of the Preston High School boys were already acquainted with Laura Bentley and some of her friends. Introductions followed rapidly.

"Drop into the Gridley seats and have some of the watermelon," Dick pressed the visitors, he and his chums standing in order to do the honors of the occasion.

"It looks as though we had been trying to invite ourselves to a banquet," laughed Hartwell, "big chief" of the Preston High School "Indians." "We didn't mean to seem as rude as that, Prescott."

"All I know," smiled Dick cordially, "is that you are all heartily welcome. Can we stir up a fire and broil some fish?"

"Don't think of it, thank you," begged Hartwell. "We've had our suppers—dinners, the hotel folks insist on calling 'em. It's jolly enough for us to be allowed to join you and see the watermelon passing around."

"Chug! chug! Puff! puff!" sounded the returning launch. Dick glanced apprehensively at Dr. Bentley and the ladies. Did the coming of the launch mean that it was about time for the pleasant evening to break up?

"Might I ask where and how you find such delicious watermelons in this neck of the woods?" inquired Brown, of the Prestons.

"Ask the young ladies," piped up Danny Grin, thereby getting himself much disliked for at least the next thirty seconds.

"Dr. Bentley and the young ladies obtained the melons from a farmer," explained Tom Reade, giving Dan an unseen poke in the small of the back.

"These melons look good enough to steal,"

laughed Hartwell, and was unable to understand the total silence that greeted his assertion.

"Help wanted from a couple of you boys!" called the voice of the launch man.

Four of Dick & Co. raced down to the water's edge. They came back, staggering under a big bucket covered on the top with bagging.

"What is this?" asked Dick.

"Ice cream," explained the doctor. "Mrs. Bentley's suggestion."

"We fellows of Preston High School feel ashamed of ourselves for having intruded," exclaimed Hartwell. "May we be permitted to withdraw?"

"At any time after ten o'clock," smiled Mrs. Bentley graciously. "We shall be very much disappointed if you leave us at present."

There was a clatter of dishes and spoons. Mrs. Bentley and Mrs. Meade presided over this part of the camp feast.

"We needn't ask you Gridley fellows if you've been having a good time," declared Hartwell presently. "But we hadn't any idea that we should intrude on an affair of this sort. In fact, while business must be barred now, I will admit that business was the object of our call."

"What sort of business?" inquired Dick Prescott.

"We came to challenge you fellows to a race," explained Big Chief Hartwell.

"A race?" chuckled Dave. "Queer how you've hit us where we live!"

"Do you think you can beat us in a canoe race?" asked Hartwell.

"Yes," Dick rejoined. "All we need to arrange is the date. We'll beat you on any date that you name! That isn't brag, please understand! It's merely the old, old Gridley High School way."

The young ladies applauded this sentiment merrily.

CHAPTER XVI

A SCALP-HUNTING DISAPPOINTMENT

"WANT to try us out, Gridley?" hailed Big Chief Hartwell, from the Preston High School canoe.

It was nearly ten o'clock the next morning, but Dick & Co. had just finished putting their camp to rights after breakfast, for they had slept late after the feast.

"Do we want to try you out?" Dick answered laughingly. "Why, we don't have to do that. We shall be ready to hand you a beating, though, at any time you ask for it. We can't help beating you, you know. It's the Gridley way!"

"Brag is a good dog," derided Brown from the bow seat of the Preston canoe.

"We keep both dogs here," Dave shouted tantalizingly.

"Are you coming out to wallop us?" Hartwell insisted.

"Yes; if you insist upon it," Dick agreed. "But we don't like to do it."

"Get into your canoe and come out and see how much of your brag you can make good," was Hartwell's calm reply.

"What? Now?" Prescott inquired.

"'Now' is always the best time to do a thing," declared Mason, of Preston High School.

"Oh, no," smiled Dick, with a shake of his head. "You fellows have been out for some time this morning. You'll have to give us time to warm up properly."

"I didn't suppose Gridley needed a little thing like that," Hartwell taunted. "You Gridleyites are such sure winners, you know, that you ought not to need such a little thing as preparation."

"One of the reasons why Gridley wins," Dick retorted, "is that we always use common sense when entering sporting events. So we'll ask you to oblige us with a gift of our rights in the matter. In fifteen minutes we'll be ready for you."

Gently the canoe was launched in the water. Harry, with a remembrance of yesterday's events, called Towser, saying sternly:

"Stay right here, boy, and watch. Maybe you'll get the rest of Rip's shirt to-day."

"And maybe he won't," chuckled Dave. "That's what I call holding out false hopes to a dog. Rip won't venture within five miles of here to-day. Yet perhaps Towser will bag some other game for us."

"Into the canoe with you, you loitering braves!" called Big Chief Prescott firmly.

Away went the Gridley war canoe, gliding smoothly.

"Our craft is the 'Pathfinder'," called Hartwell, across the water. "What do you call your boat?"

"The 'Scalp-hunter'," smiled Dick. As a matter of fact he and his friends had forgotten to name the canoe, but he supplied the name on the spur of the moment. It made a prompt hit with his chums.

"You don't believe you can win any race with such paddling as yours, do you?" Hartwell called derisively.

"We don't show all our fine points to the enemy until the battle is on," was Prescott's amiable answer. "Even then you won't see all our best tricks; you'll be too busy paddling to keep in sight of us."

Only very gradually did Dick allow his crew to warm up to their work. The Preston boys soon paddled over to the middle of the lake, and there lay resting.

"Now, we'll go back and give them a brush," Dick murmured to his chums. "Don't exceed any orders that I give in the brush. Don't be at all uneasy if we find the Prestons going ahead of us."

"Haven't we got to win?" queried Dave.

"Especially after all the brag we've been throwing in their direction?" Tom supplemented.

"We'll win if we can do it easily," Dick answered. "Otherwise we won't."

"Then what becomes of our Gridley talk?" asked Greg.

"The difference is that this isn't a real race to-day," Prescott explained. "This is only a brush, and we're in it only to see what the Preston boys can show us about canoe handling."

At a rather slow, easy dip, the "Scalp-hunter" ranged up near the "Pathfinder."

"All ready there, Gridley?" called Hartwell rather impatiently.

"As ready as we're going to be," said Dick.

"Flying start, or from a stop?"

"Either," Dick nodded.

"Then," proposed Hartwell, "move along until your prow is flush with ours. When I give the word both crews paddle for all they're worth. Steer for the two blasted pines at the lower end of the lake."

"That's good," Dick agreed.

Very gently the war canoe ranged alongside, her bark sides, well-oiled, glistening in the sunlight. The Preston canoe was not of bark, but of cedar frame, covered with canvas.

Hartwell evidently wanted a wholly fair race, for he even allowed the "Scalp-hunter's" prow the lead of a couple of feet before he shouted:

"Go it!"

Amid a great flashing of paddles the two canoes started. The Preston High School craft soon obtained a lead of a foot or so, and held it. Now the contest was a stubborn one. Gridley gained two feet more.

"You see," called Dick in a low voice, "this is the Gridley way."

"Is it?" Hartwell inquired. "Hanky-pank!"

Plainly enough the last two words were a signal. Though the Preston High School boys did not make much visible change in their style or speed of dip, the "Pathfinder" now gained perceptibly. Within a minute she had a lead of a clean ten feet, and seemed likely to increase the interval.

"Why don't you come along, Gridley?" called back the big chief in the leading canoe.

"Too early," smiled Dick. Nor did he allow the Gridley boys to increase their speed. Presently the "Pathfinder" led by two lengths.

"Why didn't you tell us," Hartwell demanded over his shoulder, "that the much-vaunted Gridley way is 'way to the rear?"

"We haven't reached the pines yet, have we?" Dick asked.

"No; and you won't, to-day, unless you push that clumsy tub of yours along faster."

"Don't wait for us," Dick answered good-naturedly. "We'll be here after a little while."

"We'll wait for you when we land," laughed Hartwell. "Mumble bumble!"

Another secret signal, surely, for again the "Pathfinder" began to increase the distance from the Gridley rival.

"We'd better stop, and pretend we're only fishing," muttered Tom Reade, but Dick kept grimly silent. He was watching every move of the Preston paddlers.

"Why, they're leading us four lengths," muttered Darrin, in an undertone. But Prescott appeared unworried.

"We'll try to brace our speed, by and by," Dick answered.

"And so will the other fellows," Tom surmised. "They're not going at anything like their pace as yet."

For a quarter of a mile the canoes held the same relative position.

"Now, liven up," Dick called softly. "One, two, three, four! One, two, three, four!"

Catching the rhythm, Dick & Co. put in some good strokes, their paddling becoming faster and stronger. A length and a half of the interval was closed up.

"Porky-poo!" ordered Hartwell.

Answering, the Preston High School boys paddled as though fury now possessed them. They held the pace, too.

"Hit it up hard, now," Dick commanded. "One, two, three, four!"

Never had Gridley responded more nobly on any field of sport or other contest than now. The paddles flew, their wet blades gleaming in the air, only to disappear under the water again. Each recovery was swift, prompt—rhythmic!

But Hartwell's crew was also showing the stuff of which it was made.

"Stop paddling—back water!" shouted Hartwell finally.

The "Pathfinder" lay on the water, motionless, only two yards from the shore on which stood the blasted pines.

At that same instant the Gridley High School "Scalp-hunter" was a trifle more than seven lengths astern.

"That was good and warming," smiled Big Chief Dick, as the second canoe came up.

"Yah, yah, yah!" retorted the Preston High School boys, betraying their delight in derisive grins.

"Where is that wonderful, all-conquering way you were telling us about?" chaffed Hartwell.

"You'll find out when we race," smiled Prescott calmly.

"When we race?" repeated Preston's big chief. "Didn't we race just now? Or do you consider that it wasn't a race just because you weren't in it?"

"It wasn't a race," Dick answered. "Merely a brush."

"Brush?" repeated Hartwell indignantly. "Didn't we challenge you fellows, and didn't you accept? Also, didn't you lose?"

"We lost the brush," Dick admitted.

"You lost the race to us," Hartwell declared stoutly. "Preston High School beat Gridley High School by several lengths!"

"Hardly that," Dick retorted coolly. "Preston High School merely distanced some boys from Gridley High School. You didn't defeat a Gridley High School canoe crew."

"Why didn't we?" the Preston High School big chief questioned.

"Because, if you recall all the chat we had last night, the 'Scalp-hunter's' crew isn't yet official. We haven't been authorized by the Athletic Council of Gridley High School."

"Is that the way you get out of it?" blurted Hartwell.

"No," Dick smiled. "That's the way we get Gridley High School out of the charge of de-

feat. As soon as we're authorized to represent Gridley High School as an official canoe crew, then you may claim any victory you can obtain over us. But you haven't beaten our high school yet for the reason that we don't officially represent Gridley High School. Isn't that all clear?"

"I suppose so," Hartwell assented disappointedly. "But we took it that we were racing the Gridley High School Canoe Club."

"Then after this you want to do more thinking," Dick laughed. "But don't feel too disappointed, Preston. Just as soon as we receive sanction from our Athletic Council we'll give you a race in earnest, and a chance for all the glory you are able to take away from us."

There was some further good-natured talk, after which the two canoe clubs separated.

Dick guided the "Scalp-hunter" back to camp. There, as soon as the canoe had been hauled ashore, Dave Darrin threw himself on the grass, remarking:

"This morning teaches us something! We're in no class with those Preston High School boys. We've no business racing, in the name of our school, before next summer!"

CHAPTER XVII

THE GOOD WORD BY WIRE

"WE'LL race within a few days," Dick declared serenely. "We've got to race soon, for our funds won't hold out long and we can't stay here all summer."

"The Athletic Council will thank us for losing the race," murmured Greg Holmes, ironically.

"We won't lose," Dick maintained, "unless you fellows throw the race against Gridley."

"Throw the race?" echoed Tom Reade indignantly. "Dick Prescott, do you think we'd do a thing like that?"

"I'm sure you wouldn't," their big chief admitted coolly.

"Do you mean to say that we didn't do our best this morning?" questioned Danny Grin.

"Our very best?" added Hazelton.

"We all did the best that was in us—this morning," Dick went on. "But we'll be a lot better prepared when we get into a real race."

"I don't believe I can paddle any harder than I did at the finish this morning," Reade argued. "In fact, I know I can't. My back aches yet with the work that I did."

"I don't doubt it," Dick smiled. "I know that my back aches."

"Then how are we going to win in any other race against Preston High School?" Darrin asked curiously.

"Did you fellows study the paddling work of the Prestons this morning?" Prescott asked.

"I saw their paddles ahead of us all the time," Greg murmured.

"That was a good place to have their paddles, for study," Dick laughed. "Couldn't you see, from their paddling, why they beat us with ease?"

"No! Could you?" challenged Tom.

"Yes. The Preston fellows dip their paddles better than we do. They dip so that the blade always cuts the breeze, instead of meeting it. When they recover they turn their paddles so as to slip them out of the water without throwing any back strain on the canoe's progress. I was studying their paddling work all the time, and I hoped that you fellows were doing the same."

"The Prestons have a lighter, swifter canoe, anyway," contended Dave.

"I think they have some advantage over us, that way," Dick nodded. "At the same time I am certain that we ought to beat Preston by beating their style of paddling."

"Beating their style of paddling?" echoed Reade. "Why, according to what you've told us we can't even equal their paddling."

"We're going to equal it," Dick answered, "and we ought to beat it. At two o'clock, fellows, we're going out for two hours of drill. Then I'll try to explain what I think I saw of the Preston superiority in dipping and recovery. If I really observed correctly, then we ought to be able to do much better, for I also think I see how to improve on the Preston High School paddle work enough to make their performance look almost clumsy."

"If you can do that," proclaimed Hazelton ungrudgingly, "then you're a wonder, Dick."

"We shall see," smiled the big chief.

"And if we don't see straight," mumbled Reade, "then Preston will hand us such a wallop that we won't even have the nerve to take up a challenge from Trentville High School."

For the rest of the morning Dick & Co. were much more thoughtful than usual. They had met defeat—a thing they didn't relish. Yet they knew, in advance, how much worse they would feel if they met a defeat when officially entered as a Gridley High School crew—for the honor of their school was dear to them all.

The noonday meal was over before one o'clock. Dick would not allow the "Scalp-

hunter'' to be put in the water a minute before two. He wanted to be sure that digestion had proceeded far enough so that they might do their best.

At the time appointed, however, he took the crew out on the water, and there carefully explained what he thought he had learned of the better paddling style of the Preston High School boys.

''You certainly did see a whole lot that I didn't see,'' Reade admitted, ''and I believe that you saw it straight, too, Dick.''

''We can certainly shoot the old canoe ahead faster, already,'' Dave murmured delightedly.

''Now, Dick, what are the improvements you thought you might have on the Preston style?'' Danny Grin asked eagerly.

''To-morrow will be time enough to try out improvements, or any kind of frills,'' Prescott answered patiently. ''For this afternoon let us confine ourselves to paddling as well as the Preston High School fellows do it. To-morrow we'll see if we can't do better than they do.''

After a little more practice it was surprising how much more easily they took to the new style of paddling.

''Rest on your paddles for a few minutes,'' Dick ordered. ''Get in some deep breaths. Then I'm going to pump up your speed to the

best that you can do with the new stroke. We'll try to go to the hotel landing flying."

When all was ready Prescott gave the word.

"Now, your best speed, and all the strength you can properly put into the work. *Go!* One, two, three, four! One, two, three, four!"

Across the lake sped the canoe, Dick & Co. fully aware that they were now traveling at a speed that had been impossible to them that same morning.

"Stop paddling! Back water! Stop backing!"

With deft movements of his own paddle, Dick swung the canoe in gently against the float.

Out of the boathouse near by came Bob Hartwell.

"I've been watching you fellows," he called.

"That's fair enough," Dick answered.

"You're doing some better than you did this morning," Hartwell went on. "You've almost got our stroke."

"Almost?" repeated young Prescott, raising his eyebrows. "Haven't we improved a good deal on your Preston High School action?"

Bob Hartwell began to laugh.

"You fellows from Gridley are always world beaters, aren't you?" he demanded good-humoredly. "At first, I thought it was all brag on your part, and that you fellows were suffering

from enlarged craniums complicated with bragitis. But now I begin to see that you talk confidently just in order to convince yourselves that you can't be beaten at anything. And I don't know that it's such bad 'dope,' either, as the sporting writers put it."

"Let's hear you try some," urged Dick.

"Brag?" asked Hartwell. "No; I don't believe I have mastered the idea well enough to do any really sincere bragging as yet. However, if you ever beat us at anything except brag, then I'm going to try to copy your form in the boasting line."

By this time Dick & Co. were dragging their canoe up onto the float.

"I hope Rip isn't sneaking anywhere about these grounds," muttered Danny Grin.

"Who's Rip?" Bob Hartwell asked curiously. Then: "Oh, I beg your pardon for being too inquisitive," as he saw Dick frown at Dalzell.

"I'm going to remain on the float, while you fellows go up into the hotel grounds," said Tom.

"All of you go, and I'll stay and watch your canoe," suggested Bob Hartwell. "That is, if you're willing to trust me as sentry."

"Of course we're willing," Dick responded. "But it's only right that one of our own crowd should do such work. Are you coming up with us, Hartwell?"

"Why, yes," Bob answered, "if I can't be of any service to you here."

Slowly the boys sauntered up through the walks. Then out on the porch came Manager Wright, waving a yellow envelope.

"That's probably the answer from the Athletic Council of Gridley High School," Dick explained, turning to Hartwell. "You don't mind if I run on ahead and leave you, do you?"

"You may run on ahead and leave me if you're as handy at running as you are at bragging," chuckled Bob. All of the boys in the group were soon at the porch. Mr. Wright descended the steps to hand Dick the envelope.

Dick tore open the envelope hurriedly.

"It's all right!" he called gleefully. "Mr. Howgate sends this word:

"'Athletic Council approves and sanctions your representing Gridley High School on the water with your Canoe Club. Wish you success! Be careful not to risk lowering Gridley's standard in sports through recklessness.'"

"When do Gridley and Preston race in a regular event?" demanded Bob Hartwell promptly.

"Mr. Wright has been most kind to us about several matters," Dick answered. "I'd like to ask him what date will be most satisfactory."

CHAPTER XVIII

"WON'T WIN AGAINST A MUDSCOW"

"HOW can we help Mr. Wright by racing?" queried Hartwell.

"By enabling me to advertise a canoe race between high school boys as an attraction to bring added guests to this hotel," the manager explained for himself. "Let me see. This is Thursday. If the race were to be held day after to-morrow—Saturday—would that give both crews time enough to get ready?"

"Saturday will suit Gridley," Dick answered promptly.

"And Preston also," guaranteed Bob Hartwell.

"At three in the afternoon on Saturday?" asked Mr. Wright.

"Yes, sir," Prescott nodded. "But will you have sufficient time to advertise, Mr. Wright?"

"Plenty of time," replied the manager, "if I send my letters away by to-night's mail. I will advertise in a Gridley paper, and also in Preston and Trentville. I will send copy to papers in a few other towns as well, and I will see to it that the railway folks know about it. Fortunately the railway people will attend to

their own advertising, as it will give them some chance to bring extra passengers. Now, boys, does either crew wish to draw any expense money to help in preparing for the race?"

"Preston High School doesn't want any expense money, thank you, sir," Bob declared quickly. "Our fellows all have abundant funds."

"The Gridley High School crew is a lot of near paupers," Dick admitted with smiling candor.

"Then you may have——"

"Thank you, Mr. Wright," Prescott went on. "I don't know that we could use money if we had it, but in any case I am certain that we couldn't accept it from the hotel management without risk of sacrificing our standing as amateurs. We might be ruled out as 'professionals' for accepting money for the race."

"Pardon me," broke in Mr. Wright, as a bellboy handed him a telegram. As he read the message a smile appeared on his face.

"Perhaps this will put a different aspect on the matter," beamed the hotel manager. "This telegram is from Mr. Howgate, and says:

"'Am mailing you check for forty dollars. Please allow Prescott, captain Gridley High School Canoe Club, to draw on you for that

amount, for boat uniforms and other expenses. Money voted by Council from High School Athletic fund.' "

"That's thoughtful," murmured young Prescott, wholly taken aback. "However, I don't believe we shall need the money."

"You ought to have some sort of uniform," suggested Hartwell. "We Preston chaps have canoe uniforms."

"We can paddle just as well without special uniforms," smiled Dick.

"But how would it look for good old Gridley High School?" hinted Bob generously. "Remember, in appearance, as well as in performance, you have the prestige and honor of your school to consider."

"I think you will do well to accept the money and get uniforms," Mr. Wright declared thoughtfully. "You will have to telegraph for them in order to have them here by Saturday."

"I have the A. B. Lollard catalogue up in my room," suggested Hartwell. "I'll run up and get it, and you fellows can look it through and make a quick decision."

"When you have the choice of uniforms made," said Mr. Wright, "write your telegram and bring it to me to sign. The Lollard people know me, and will honor my order."

Now that matters had been arranged so as to be strictly within amateur usages, Dick, Dave and the others found that they had a new cause for interest as they glanced through the bewildering display of uniforms offered in the catalogue.

When the choice had been made Dick turned to young Holmes to say:

"Greg, run down to the landing to relieve Tom, and ask him to hurry up here. We want him, too, to approve our selection or to state his disapproval."

Reade arrived with a breathlessness that testified to his having run all the way. Needless to say, he heartily agreed with his chums as to the uniform selected by them.

The uniform chosen was not expensive. It consisted of sleeveless cotton shirts, white cotton trousers, knee-length, and with a red stripe down the sides, and thin, light boating shoes.

The total cost, per boy, was three dollars and eighty-three cents. Certainly not an expensive canoeing uniform! There would be some express charges to pay in addition.

"You'll have about fifteen dollars left for anything else that you may need," suggested Mr. Wright.

"Yes; but we don't wish to spend it," Dick replied. "It is only the thought of the Gridley

High School that makes us decide on any uniform at all."

"You couldn't have been more modest," smiled Bob Hartwell, as he thought of the more expensive uniforms of his own crew.

The telegram was prepared. Mr. Wright signed it and sent it away. Then he hastened to his office to prepare his own advertising matter.

As the Gridley girls were nowhere to be seen about the grounds, Dick did not inquire for them. Instead he and his chums hurried back to the lake, where they put in another hour in hard practice. Prescott kept his crew out on the lake, in about the middle, where his low-spoken directions could not be heard from the shore.

"Are we going to win, now?" asked Dan Dalzell.

"How can we help it, when we are to wear such dazzling uniforms?" queried Reade.

"We've got to do a lot of hard work to-morrow, and on Saturday morning," Dave added. "I doubt if we yet paddle anywhere near the Preston High School performance."

"We'll work hard to-morrow," Dick agreed, "but after that we will have to be satisfied with what we've done. Saturday morning we don't want to do any hard work. Just enough exer-

cise to keep our muscles supple for the real fray of the afternoon."

"We ought to stay out longer now," urged Hazelton.

"Do you fellows think so?" asked Dick thoughtfully. "It seems to me that we've done enough hard canoe work for to-day. We don't want to go stale from too much training."

"But we can't—we mustn't—lose the race on Saturday," almost groaned Dave Darrin.

"Then we'll do better not to overtrain," said Dick quietly. "Unless I hear a big kick I'm going to turn the canoe toward our camp."

There was no objection, though some of the members of Dick & Co. frowned slightly. They had great confidence in Dick's judgment, yet he seemed to them over cautious in training.

"I wish it were Saturday night," murmured Tom Reade, lying on the grass full length, after they had landed.

"So that you'd know how it feels to be licked and to have your school licked, too?" inquired Danny Grin.

"Stop that talk!" ordered Tom gruffly. "We're not going to be beaten. We'd hardly dare show our faces again in Gridley if Preston High School took us into camp."

"Then how will the Preston fellows feel if we distance 'em?" Greg inquired.

"Oh, it won't matter as much over at Preston," Tom replied coolly. "Preston hasn't such a big reputation for winning athletic events as Gridley has."

"The more I think of it," muttered Dave, "the more I marvel at our cheek. We are barely more than freshmen. As yet we've entered the sophomore class only by promotion. Yet we get away from home and immediately start in to fight under the Gridley colors, just as though we were real juniors or seniors! My, but I'll hate myself if we get walloped Saturday afternoon!"

"We'd all dislike ourselves," smiled Dick Prescott calmly. "That is why we haven't any thought of allowing ourselves to be beaten, either by Preston or Trentville."

"I wonder if Trentville is as good as Preston?" asked Tom curiously.

"We can't tell until we see them work," suggested Greg.

"Who's going to eat, and when?" asked Dan.

That started the crowd to making preparations for the camp supper. It was prepared in good time, and six healthy boys sat down to enjoy it. After that came a period of blissful idleness. Then, more or less reluctantly, the youngsters set about washing the dishes and setting the camp straight in general.

"Better throw some wood on the fire; it's getting pretty dark," suggested Dick. "I'll get the lantern and light it."

Gr-r-r-r-r! came the voice of Towser, in the near distance. It was followed by barks and yelps, all in the voice of Hazelton's bull-dog.

"What trouble has the pup gotten into?" demanded Harry, throwing an armful of wood on the campfire, then wheeling sharply.

Gr-r-r-r! Wow-wow! Woof! sounded closer at hand, accompanied by considerable noise in the underbrush.

"That pup's in trouble," declared Tom sagely. "Come along, fellows! Bring the lantern, Dick!"

Six boys, headed by Dick with the lantern, went to meet the bull-dog. They came upon Towser, growling in a most excited manner, threshing something about him in the bushes as he came toward them.

"Hold still, boy!" commanded Harry. "What is it, old chap?"

Then he came upon the dog. In the darkness it was not easy to make out what ailed Towser. But Prescott came closer to the dog with the lantern.

"Towser has his foot caught in a steel trap. I'm afraid his leg is broken," quivered Hazelton, as he threw himself on the ground beside

his pet. "Hold still, boy! Let me take it off of you."

The dog permitted himself to be held while Tom Reade pried open the jaws of the steel fox trap, the chain to which the pup had dragged over the ground.

"That's a queer accident," commented Greg Holmes.

"Accident?" flamed Harry. "This thing is no accident. It was done on purpose, and I wouldn't need but one guess to name the two-legged cur that did this!"

All of the boys understood at once that Hazelton was accusing Fred Ripley of setting the trap.

Towser, as soon as released, limped a little, but proved that his leg was not broken, though it had been cut in the trap.

"Woof!" he exploded angrily, as soon as he found that he could run about on his injured leg. Then, showing his teeth, he growled menacingly and bounded through the woods, Dick & Co. following pell-mell.

"Towser knows that his enemy is still near!" called Harry exultantly. "Come on, fellows! We'll catch that sneak!"

A bull-dog's strong point is not his scent. He led the boys to the roadway, then halted, growling, plainly at fault.

Perched up in a tree not fifty yards away, well hidden by the foliage, were Fred Ripley and another youth. For a few moments they listened breathlessly to the pursuit, then appeared to feel more at their ease.

"You didn't work the trap trick quite right," whispered Fred to the youth in overalls beside him.

"Better luck next time," whispered back the stranger. "But no matter. I see how we can fix the canoe so that it couldn't win a race against a mudscow!"

CHAPTER XIX

WHAT AILED GRIDLEY?

"THERE'S an automobile full of Gridley folks coming up to the lake to-day!" cried Susie Sharp excitedly as she ran to meet her girl friends at the landing stage.

"How do you know?" asked Laura eagerly.

"Mr. Wright has just received a telephone message, asking that arrangements be made to give them supper here. They're going back in the evening."

"Dick will be so pleased!" cried Laura.

"All of our boys will be delighted, I imagine," replied Susie dryly.

"Of course; that is what I meant," explained Laura, flushing slightly.

"I know. You think that Dick Prescott is the only boy at Lake Pleasant," teased Miss Sharp.

"Stop that!" begged Clara Marshall. "Don't talk nonsense."

At one end of the float lay the "Pathfinder." At the other end lay the "Scalp-hunter," as shining as a thorough overhauling and a coating of oil could make her.

Over the latter canoe the Gridley High School

girls had posted themselves as a sort of guard of honor.

Not that there was any suspicion that either of the canoes would be tampered with. High school and college sports are "clean." No underhanded tricks are resorted to by competitors for the sake of winning.

In the boathouse near by sat the members of both crews, mingling on the most friendly terms. With them were some of the officials of the race.

Dotted along the water front of the hotel grounds were many little groups of waiting spectators in chairs, on campstools or sitting on the grass.

In the morning buoys had been set on the lake at each end of a measured course. The course was to be a mile, around the upper buoy and returning to the starting line. The usual rules of boat and canoe racing were to apply as to clear water, fouling and the like, as well as the right of way at the upper buoy in case the rival canoes were close together.

"It's half-past two o'clock now," announced the starter, glancing at his watch.

"At two-forty," stated the referee, "I shall order both canoes into the water. As soon after that as each crew captain chooses he may put his men aboard and take such warming-up

work as he may wish. At two-fifty-six the first gun will be fired, and both crews must come promptly to the judges' boat for alignment. At exactly three the second shot will be fired—the starting signal. Has either captain any questions to ask?"

Neither captain had any questions.

"Let me know, time-keeper, when it is two-forty," said the referee, going toward the door. "Both captains will be on the alert to avoid delays."

As the referee glanced out he saw that at least four hundred spectators were on hand. Two stage loads of men, woman, boys and girls had already arrived from Preston. Trentville also had sent a delegation.

"What's all that yelling with 'Gridley' in it?" cried Dick, jumping up and moving toward the door.

He was followed by his chums. They reached the float in time to see the automobile bus from Gridley coming down to the water front. In it were some thirty people of all ages.

"Oh, you Prescott!" yelled one irrepressible young man, through a megaphone. "Don't you dare make fools of us this afternoon! Gridley must win!"

"Don't worry!" Dick shouted back, waving his hand. "Gridley is going to win!"

"Yes, sirree!" called Bob Hartwell, laughingly. "Preston High School guarantees Gridley to be a winner—for second place!"

People now came crowding down upon the float to such an extent that Mr. Wright had to use the services of four hotel employés in coaxing them to keep back out of the way of the crews.

"No further admittance to the float, ladies and gentlemen!" called the hotel manager. "Keep it clear for the use of the crews!"

"Remember, Prescott," shouted a voice, "nothing but a win!"

"That's the Gridley way," Dick called back.

"Crew captains!" shouted the referee. "Ready to launch your craft! Time for a bit of preliminary practice."

"Take hold and launch!" cried Bob Hartwell, running forward.

Over into the water went the Preston High School canoe with a splash. The Preston boys began to fill their places.

"Gridley, stand by to launch!" called Prescott. "Slide her in, easily!"

As graceful as a thing of life the big war canoe slipped into the water, then lay there like a swan. Dave Darrin took hold of the bow-line, the pretty craft resting lightly against the float.

"Aren't you going to take your men out and warm them up, Prescott?" asked Referee Tyndall.

"No, sir; only for the last five minutes. We want only work enough to start the blood to moving well."

So only Dave stood by the canoe. Hatless, the Gridley High School boys paced up and down the float, awaiting word from Big Chief Prescott before embarking.

"I wish Dick would put our boys to work at once," murmured Belle uneasily. "Look what a fine showing Bob Hartwell's Preston fellows are making out there."

In truth the Preston boys were making a splendid showing with their brisk, steady, sturdy paddling. Many a cheer went up from shore for them.

"Time for us, Gridley," announced Prescott, when some minutes had passed.

Alertly his chums sprang to their posts. In a twinkling they were seated, each with his paddle in hand, holding lightly to the float.

"Shove off," said Dick, in a very low voice.

As the "Scalp-hunter" started for the middle of the lake a wild Gridley yell broke loose.

But none of the boys paid heed. Each had his ears alert only for the orders of the captain.

Somehow, as the canoe moved out, each one had the same feeling. The "Scalp-hunter" was not moving quite as it should do.

"There is at least one of you fellows who isn't doing all he should, or just as he should," Dick murmured quietly. "Which one is it?"

There was no immediate response, though all five of the boys gave renewed attention to their work. Still, all of them had the same uneasy impression that there "was a screw loose somewhere."

"It's just as though we had a drag holding us back," Dick muttered disappointedly.

"Perhaps it's only because we're not quite warmed up yet," Tom hinted.

"No; it isn't that," Prescott responded. "I wish I knew just what does ail us. Take the second speed, fellows, and each of you watch his dip and recovery. Remember, it's the disciplined paddling that wins a canoe race."

At the next speed they went forward a little faster, to be sure. Yet there was a decided lack of speed or a pull-back somewhere.

"Don't lose your nerve, Gridley!" floated Hartwell's voice over the water as the Preston canoe shot by at a wind-jamming speed.

"Want a tow, Gridley?" hailed someone from shore.

"Next speed, fellows! Hit it up hard!"

called Dick Prescott. Perspiration from extreme nervousness broke out on his forehead and back.

Strive as he would, the crew captain of the Gridleys could not shake off the gloomy depression that assailed him. Something was wrong—radically wrong! The "Scalp-hunter" was not showing a winning gait!

"Best speed—and work, fellows!" called Dick, as quietly as ever, though in his voice there was a note almost of despair.

Now, indeed, the Gridley craft sped through the water. Yet all of her crew, and many people on shore, realized that the war canoe was not showing a prize-taking gait.

How Dick, Dave, Tom and the others worked, bending all their energies to the task! Yet all felt the same awful doubts.

Bang! The first gun had sounded.

"Down to the line, fellows!" Dick called. "Put in all the steam you can. I was wrong not to have warmed you up before. Get your blood to moving. One, two, three, four! Hump it! Hump it!"

Their bodies streaming with perspiration, breath coming fast, their faces deeply flushed, Dick & Co. bent to their paddling. They were moving fast, yet not as fast as they should be moving.

"What on earth can ail our boys?" cried Laura Bentley anxiously as she watched.

"They're moving fast," replied Clara Marshall.

"Yet not the way they should move," Laura insisted. "There's nothing about them of the easy, brisk form that Preston High School shows to-day."

"Don't hint at defeat!" shuddered Belle Meade. "We might be able to stand a Gridley defeat, but the boys couldn't."

Preston's canoe now rested on the water, ready to be aligned at the referee's order. Gridley's craft seemed to be straining as she neared the line.

Suddenly three sharp, short, shrill blasts sounded from the whistle of the judges' launch.

"Prescott!" roared the referee.

"Now, what's up, I wonder?" Dick asked himself, with another sinking feeling at heart.

The judges' boat was making fast time toward the Gridley High School entry.

CHAPTER XX

"DINKY-BAT! HOT SAIL!"

"CAPTAIN PRESCOTT, what is wrong with your boat?" demanded Referee Tyndall, as the judges' launch stole up close.

"Something seems to be wrong with us, I'll admit, sir," Dick made answer. "I'll be greatly obliged to you, sir, if you'll tell me what it is."

"What are you towing?" asked the referee bluntly.

"Towing?" repeated Dick in bewilderment.

"That's what I asked," repeated the referee. "When you came down on this last spurt I'm sure that at one moment I saw a length of line rise above the water astern of you. Then, further back, I saw something else jerked to the surface."

"Why, we can't be towing anything," Dick insisted. "You saw our canoe launched."

"Late start, if you don't line the canoes up at once, referee," warned the time-keeper.

But Mr. Tyndall had his own views.

"The starting time will be delayed," he announced sharply. "Captain Prescott, take your canoe to the landing stage."

"All right, sir."

"Captain Hartwell, you will follow."

"Very good, sir."

Going in to the landing stage Dick gave his crew an easy pace, yet they were soon alongside the float.

"Now, take your canoe out of water, Gridley," commanded the referee, stepping ashore from the launch. "I want a look at the craft."

Dick & Co. lifted the war canoe to the float bow first. Just as the stern cleared the water a cry went up from scores of throats.

For the referee had grasped a line made fast to the bottom of the canoe near the stern.

Hauling on that line he brought in several yards of it—then, at the outer end of the line came a light blanket, dripping. Through the middle of the blanket the end of the line had been secured.

Dick Prescott gasped. His chums rubbed their eyes. Bob Hartwell, who had landed, looked on in utter consternation.

"For the love of decency!" gasped Referee Tyndall. "Who rigged on a drag like that."

The blanket, towing below the surface, was a drag that could be depended upon, perhaps, to delay the canoe at least one length in every dozen that her crew could put her through the water.

"None of our fellows did that trick," Dick declared hotly. "You saw us launch our canoe, Mr. Referee, and she was clear when we launched her."

"I naturally wouldn't suspect the Gridley crew of rigging a drag on the Gridley canoe," remarked the referee dryly, as he followed the line back to the canoe. "See! Some scoundrel managed to twist a screw-eye into one of your frame timbers underneath. The line is made fast to the screw-eye. Captain Prescott, that could have been done by someone hidden under this float while your craft lay alongside. He could bring his mouth above water, under the timbers of this float. Then, with his hand and arm hidden under water the same rascal could easily reach out and fasten in the screw-eye."

"Prescott," gasped Bob Hartwell, in a disgusted voice, "I hope you don't believe that any of our fellows, or their friends, could be guilty of such contemptible work!"

"Hartwell," Dick answered promptly, resting a hand on the arm of the Preston High School boy, "I am offended that you should believe us capable of suspecting Preston High School of anything as mean as this. Of course we don't suspect Preston High School!"

The referee himself now twisted the screw-eye out of its bed in the canoe frame. Then he

gathered up the wet cord and blanket and hurled the whole mass shoreward.

"I'd pay twenty-five dollars out of my own pocket," the race official declared hotly, "for proof against the scoundrel who tried to spoil clean sport in this manner!"

Nearly all of the crowd of spectators had now surged down close to the float.

"I think we could make a pretty good guess at who is behind this contemptible business," snarled Danny Grin, his face, for once, darkened by a threatening frown.

"Who did it?" challenged Referee Tyndall.

Dalzell opened his mouth, but Prescott broke in sharply with the command:

"Be silent, Dan! Don't mention a name when you haven't proof."

"Can it possibly be anyone from Preston?" asked Hartwell anxiously. "If it is, I beg you, Dalzell, to let me have the name—privately, if need be. I'd spend the summer running down this thing."

"I know whom Dalzell has in mind, Hartwell," Dick rejoined. "It's no one from within a good many miles of Preston, either. But we have no right to make accusation without an iota of proof."

"Then you decline to allow the name to be furnished?" blurted the referee.

"I refuse, sir, for the same reason that you would," Dick answered coolly. "Only a coward, a knave or a fool will accuse another person without some reasonable proof to offer. No great harm has been done, anyway. The drag was found in time."

"Get your canoe out, Hartwell," ordered Mr. Tyndall. "This time, when we launch them, we'll make sure that both craft are in good order."

When the "Pathfinder" was hauled up on the float she was found to be free from any evidences of trickery.

"Now, launch, and we'll watch each canoe until it puts off," announced Mr. Tyndall. "Captain Prescott, will ten minutes be enough for you before the sounding of the first gun?"

"Yes, sir."

"I'd rather you gave Gridley plenty of time, sir," urged Bob Hartwell. "If we can't win from Gridley High School fairly, we don't want to win at all."

"First gun, then, at three-twenty-eight," called Mr. Tyndall. "Second gun at three-thirty."

Slowly the "Pathfinder" followed the "Scalp-hunter" out into midlake.

"How does your craft go now, Gridley?" hailed the big chief from Preston.

"She goes like a canoe now," Dick called back joyously.

Then he set his chums to easy paddling. All six of Dick & Co. felt a thrill of joy at realizing the difference in the canoe's behavior.

"We'll win, all right," predicted Prescott joyously.

"If we don't, we'll make motions that look like putting up a hard fight, anyway," Tom answered him.

"I wish I had my foot on the neck of the cur that rigged the drag!" muttered Darrin vindictively.

"I don't," Dick answered quietly. "The fellow who rigged the drag probably wasn't the same fellow who planned the scheme."

"I'm going to provoke a fight with a certain party, one of these days, anyway," threatened Dave, his brow dark with anger.

"Forget it now," Dick urged. "The fellow whose mind is ruled by an angry passion isn't in the best form for athletic work. Banish all unpleasant thoughts, all of you fellows."

By degrees the big chief from Gridley warmed up his braves in the war canoe. He had them going in earnest, at nearly their best speed, just as the first gun was fired—a pistol in the hand of the starter on board the judges' boat.

"We'll go over there in our best style," Pres-

cott called. "Try to give the people on shore something worth looking at—they've waited long enough to see something! One, two, three, four! One, two, three, four!"

In absolute precision the Gridley High School boys moved at their work, their swift, deft, strong strokes sending the birch bark craft darting over the water in a fashion that brought a cheer from shore.

"Deep breathing just as soon as we're at rest at the line," Dick warned his chums. "At the start try to make the first breath carry you for four strokes!"

In a short time the referee had the canoes with their noses at the line, and at an interval from each other satisfactory to him.

"Thirty seconds to the start!" called the time-keeper. "Twenty seconds!"

In the Gridley canoe each boy sat bent slightly forward, his paddle raised at the proper position.

"Ten seconds!" called the starter. Then——

Bang! Away shot the canoes. Over all other sounds could be heard Dick's low-toned:

"One, two, three, four! One, two, three, four!"

The Preston boys heard him, and Dick noted, with amusement, that they unconsciously adapted their own stroke to his count.

"Cut that numeral business," grunted Bob Hartwell, across the water. "You're queering our fellows."

"They mustn't listen to our signals," Dick laughed back. "One, two, three, four!"

"Come on, fellows; get ahead of that Gridley crowd, where we can't hear 'em," urged Hartwell. "Hanky pank!"

At that the Preston canoe managed to get a slight lead. Dick did not vary his count, however. He had no objection to being led slightly to the upper buoy.

Soon, however, Preston High School made the distance two lengths. Dick began to count a bit faster.

"Put a little more steam on, fellows," he urged.

So the gap was closed up somewhat. But Hartwell, glancing back, called:

"Mumbleby hoptop!"

Whatever that signal meant the Preston boys were now paddling a stronger and slightly swifter stroke. Dick, too, increased the stroke.

Despite it all, however, Preston was now securing more and more of a lead by almost imperceptible gains. Dave Darrin, in the bow seat of the war canoe, eyed the water interval between the two canoes with a frowning glance.

"More steam!" Dick urged. As the Gridley

canoe went creeping up on the rival craft, Hartwell muttered another of his ridiculous code signals.

"Preston hasn't let itself out yet, and we're next door to panting already," Tom Reade told himself, with a sinking heart. "We were fools to enter as a school crew without more practice!"

At this time Dick Prescott was the only one in the war canoe who serenely ignored all doubts. Of course he couldn't be sure that he would win. In fact, all the chances appeared against him. But the absurd habit, as it seemed to others, of feeling that Gridley could not be beaten, was strong upon him.

More than half way to the upper buoy Preston High School led by more than two lengths.

"Get on, Gridley! Get on! Do something!" came the distant yet distinct yells from shore. Many spectators, in carriages, or on bicycles, were following the rival crews.

"Prescott, what ails you?" came a wailing cry from shore.

There were other discouraging calls, too. Had Dick been less strong in his faith in Dick & Co. he might have gone to pieces under the nagging.

Bob Hartwell, glancing smilingly back over one shoulder, saw the Gridley boys working.

"We've got 'em stung, fellows," called the Preston High School big chief to his crew. "Take it easy, but don't let 'em gain anything. We won't try to increase the lead until we're on the last half of the home stretch."

A hundred and fifty yards from the upper buoy Dick passed the word:

"Now, hump a bit. We want to worry 'em as we get to the buoy. Make it hot for Preston! One, two, three, four!"

Some of that distance was covered. As Preston rounded the buoy Hartwell and his crew came face to face with Gridley, about to round it.

"One, two, three, four!" almost drawled Dick. He had already passed the signal to his own men, not one of whom obeyed his slow count, but on the other hand, Preston High School for the space of about fifteen seconds, slowed to that crawling count.

"Brace up, you dubs! Paddle!" roared Hartwell. "Never mind that funeral march. Dipperty-dip!"

Preston recovered from its brief trance and shot ahead. But Gridley was already around the buoy and coming fast.

Half way home from the upper buoy found Preston going strongly, two and a half lengths ahead of Gridley High School.

"Oh, you, Prescott, get up and run!" came the dismal, desperate advice from shore.

As he mentally measured the distance, now, to the finishing line, Dick Prescott's eyes flashed.

"Now, your reserve power, fellows!" he called in a low, tense voice. "Make every stroke count! Full muscle! Never mind your backs! One, two, three, four!"

A splendid showing Gridley made. Soon the lead of the rivals was less than two lengths.

"Steam-ho!" called Hartwell. "Hot sail!"

Preston's paddles flashed in the sunlight in unison, in the best, swiftest stroke they had yet shown. Over on shore the Preston boosters let their lungs loose in cheering yells.

"Wait for a tugboat, Prescott!"

"You're up against the real thing, Gridley!"

"Come on in, Hartwell! The other canoe is tied to the shore!"

"More steam!" ordered Dick. "More steam! Your best, prize winning stroke now."

Again Hartwell glanced backward. Now the prow of the war canoe was less than half a length from the stern of the Preston craft.

Up and up it came. Hartwell, in a burst of energy, shouted his prize signal:

"Dinky-bat! Hot sail!"

The new spurt carried Preston High School ahead once more.

CHAPTER XXI

NATURE HAS A DISMAL STREAK

"COME on, Prescott!"

"Or else sink!"

"Don't come back to Gridley!"

The cries from shore, as the Gridley boosters noted the effects of the fine Preston work, were not encouraging.

"Preston High School wins!"

Indeed, it looked as though Hartwell's craft must be the winner. Shorter and shorter became the distance to the finish line.

True, Big Chief Dick was bringing his prow close up to the stern of the "Pathfinder" once more, but Preston evidently had a little reserve steam left as yet.

"Go it, Hartwell! Go it! You win! Hurrah!"

Suddenly over the water traveled Dick Prescott's command:

"Now, then, Gridley! Break your backs!"

This time there was no counting, nor was there any need of any. From Dave back to Dick all six bent their full strength and wind to the task of making the "Scalp-hunter" dart over the water. It was a grueling, killing pace

that Dick had set for his crew, but it did not need to last long. The finish line was close at hand.

Hartwell saw the "Scalp-hunter's" prow steal up on a level with the centre of his own canoe.

"Go it, fellows—one last, big spurt!" he yelled.

A sudden yell from shore told another story. The war canoe's nose was now six feet further along than the bow of the Preston canoe.

"Come on, Dick! Come on! Come on!"

"Speed! The last swift dash!" yelled Dick Prescott. "Bend to it!"

Hartwell tried to call to his crew, but could not make himself heard. The yelling from the shore, and from the boats nearby drowned out all other sounds.

The two canoes seemed to be rivaling express trains in their speed. Then the cheers of one faction drowned the groans of the other.

Gridley High School had shot across the finish line by a length and a half lead over Preston High School.

Just as the "Pathfinder" left the line astern there came from the Preston craft a sound like the report of a pistol.

One of the Preston braves had snapped his paddle off just above the blade.

As the "Scalp-hunter" swung about, Dick saw that broken-off blade floating on the water.

"I'm glad that paddle didn't snap until you had crossed the line," Dick panted. "If it had, the real result would have been in doubt."

"Your crew won, Prescott!" called Bob Hartwell in a husky voice. "Congratulations!"

"Thank you," returned Dick. "You're surely a generous enemy."

"Rivals, this afternoon, but enemies never!" protested young Hartwell.

Now a blast from the whistle of the launch recalled the two canoes. Standing in the bow of the launch, Referee Tyndall announced so that those on shore might hear plainly:

"Gridley wins by a length and a half!"

From the shore came a wild cheer. There was also a frenzied waving of handkerchiefs and of parasols. Though the Gridley boosters might be few in number, they were great in enthusiasm.

As the "Pathfinder" started in for the landing float a crowd made a rush to meet the canoes. It was not, however, the Preston craft that the crowd wanted, for this was a Gridley crowd.

Noting the fact with his keen eyes, Dick gave the word for easy paddling. Then he swung the war canoe about, heading toward camp.

"Gridley Wins!"

That proved not at all to the crowd's liking.

"Come back, Prescott! This way, Gridley! We want you!"

"Why don't you land, Dick?" queried Tom Reade.

"What! Land at the mercy of that crowd!" exclaimed Prescott. "That is a Gridley crowd. They're so pleased over our winning that what they'd do to us might be worse than what they'd have done if we had lost."

"Where are you going?" asked Dave, somewhat disappointed.

"Camp is good enough for us, I guess. It's a safe place, anyway," Prescott replied.

A few minutes later the "Scalp-hunter" touched lightly on the beach in front of camp.

Towser greeted them with a joyous bark.

"So you've been watching the race instead of the camp, have you?" demanded Tom, eyeing the dog in mock reproach.

"Oh, but I'm tired!" muttered Darrin, after they had beached the canoe. "This green grass looks inviting."

He threw himself down at full length on the grass.

"Up, for yours," commanded Dick, grasping him by one arm and pulling Dave to his feet. "Don't you know that your blood is almost at fever heat after the strain of the race? Do

you want to get a chill that will keep the whole camp up to-night?"

"I want to lie down," muttered Darrin. "And I want to sleep."

"Then get off your racing clothes, put on your other clothes, then roll yourself well in your blankets and lie down in the tent," Dick ordered. "That's what I'm going to do."

Now that the strain was over every member of Dick & Co. found himself so weary that the putting on of ordinary clothes was a process which proceeded slowly. After a while, however, all six had rolled themselves in their blankets and lay on the leaf-piled floor of the tent.

All but Dick and Harry were asleep, presently, when an automobile stopped near the camp.

"Anyone at home?" called Referee Tyndall, poking his head in past the flap of the tent and viewing the recumbent lads. "All here? That's good. I'm a committee of one, sent over here by the Gridley folks at the hotel. They're ordering a supper and they want you boys to come over promptly. You're to be the guests of honor."

"Will you be good enough to present the Gridley people with our best thanks," returned Dick promptly, rising to greet the referee, "and

ask them very kindly to excuse us? Assure them, please, that we're in strict training, with more races to come, and that banquets would perhaps spoil us for the next race."

"I'm afraid I'll have difficulty in getting that message through," protested Mr. Tyndall. "Your Gridley friends are bound to have you over at the hotel."

"They can't get us there with anything less than the state militia," declared Dave, who had awakened. "We can fight and whip any smaller body of armed men that tries to drag us away from our rest. Our friends are good to us—but can't they understand that we ache?"

"You *do* look rather played out," assented Mr. Tyndall, after surveying the various wrapped bundles of high school boy humanity. "But can't you raise enough energy to come over in an hour?"

"If the Gridley people are really our friends," protested Tom Reade, opening his eyes, "they'll let us sleep through until to-morrow morning. We nearly killed our tender young selves in that last big spurt, and now we must rest our bones and aching muscles."

"But what can I tell the folks at the hotel?" begged Mr. Tyndall.

"Tell 'em that we appreciate their kindness," laughed Dick.

"All right. I'll tell them—something," murmured Mr. Tyndall, as he turned away.

"Up, all of you fellows!" commanded Dick Prescott. "This doesn't look very gracious on our part, when an entertainment has been arranged for us. We'll go, and attend to our aches to-morrow."

But when the referee of the afternoon noted how stiffly they all moved he found himself filled with compassion.

"Don't you try to come over, boys," he urged. "You're too stiff and sore to-night. Some people, myself included, don't realize that fifteen-year-old boys haven't the bodily stamina of men of twenty-five. You did a splendid bit of work this afternoon, and now you're entitled to your rest."

"We'll get over there, somehow," Dick promised.

"No; you won't. Don't you try it. The Gridley visitors would be brutes to try to drag you out to-night. I shan't let you go, and I shall tell the home folks that you're enjoying a well-won rest."

"But don't you let any of the Preston High School fellows know how crippled you found us," begged Dave Darrin.

"What would you care, if I did?" laughed Mr. Tyndall. "You fellows won the race,

didn't you? And I'll wager that the Preston boys are feeling a whole lot worse than you are. Don't come! Good night."

"Tyndall is a brick to let us off," sighed Tom gratefully, as he sank down once more.

Later on Dick & Co. emerged from the tent, started a fire, and had supper, though they did not pay great attention to the meal.

"I wouldn't want to race every day," grunted Reade, as he squatted near the fire after supper.

"If we did," Dick retorted, "we'd speedily get over these aches and this stiffness."

For an hour or so the boys remained about the fire. Dan Dalzell was the first to slip away to his blankets. Hazelton followed. Then the movement became general. Soon all were sound asleep.

Nor did any sounds reach or disturb them for hours. Not one of the sleepers stirred enough to know that the sky gradually became overcast and that there was a distant rumbling of thunder.

Hardly had the campfire burned down into the general blackness of the night when an automobile runabout, moving slowly and silently, stole along the roadway.

In it sat the son of Squire Ripley. Fred, having brooded for hours over the failure of his

scheme to make Dick & Co. lose the canoe race, had at last decided to pay a stealthy, nocturnal visit to the camp of the boys he disliked, with the express purpose of doing whatever mischief his hands might find to do.

His father's family car and automobile runabout were both at the hotel garage, and at his disposal. Soon Fred Ripley was speeding away over the country road in the automobile runabout.

As he neared the camp he extinguished the running lights, then went on slowly so as to make no noise. At last he stopped the car.

Gr-r-r-r! came out of the darkness. Faithful Towser was still at his post. He came forward slowly, suspiciously out of the darkness. He may have recognized his enemy, for Towser came close to the car, showing his teeth in an ugly fashion.

Fred lost no time in starting his car forward.

"I wish that pup would have the nerve to get in front of the car," he muttered as he drove slowly away from the camp. "What fun it would be to run over the brute! I don't dare to get out of the car while he's on guard. I forgot about him for the time being, though goodness knows I've cause to remember him."

Towser uttered one or two farewell growls. Two hundred yards further on Fred let out the

speed in earnest, at the same time switching on the electric running lights.

"I'll come back late to-night," Fred reflected. "I'll leave the machine a little way down the road, and come up here on foot. In the meantime I'll think of some scheme to get square with Dick Prescott and his crowd. I'll hunt up a good stout club, too, and then if that confounded dog is troublesome I'll settle him."

For an hour or more Fred ran the car at random over one country road after another.

"I wonder if that pup ever goes to sleep," he muttered. "I'd really like to know. If I'm going back that way to-night I'd better be turning about, for there is a bad storm coming."

Turning the car, he drove swiftly back again. In about twenty minutes he reached a part of the road directly above the camp.

Overhead the lightning was flashing brightly. Heavy thunder followed each flash. Large drops of rain were falling, but Fred, bent on his evil errand, did not mind. At any rate he was not afraid of lightning. Aided by the flashes he searched along the side of the road until he found a branch of a tree that he shaped into a club with his knife.

"I won't wake Prescott's muckers," he reflected, "and I want to be sure to attract the dog's notice if he is on guard."

A broad, white streak of lightning showed the tent from the road as Ripley, armed with the club, drew nearer to it.

Fred halted. "They're all asleep, the muckers!" he muttered. "I'm glad of that. Where is that dog? Why doesn't he come around? I'm ready for him now."

Fred stole stealthily along, keeping a sharp lookout for the bull-dog.

Suddenly the sky was rent by a vivid flash of lightning so glaring that the lawyer's son covered his eyes with his hands.

Bang! Crash! Almost instantly the thunder followed the flash.

"It's time to be getting out of here if I don't want to get drowned on the way back to the hotel," Ripley decided. "I'll have to postpone getting square with Prescott. Besides, the storm will waken those fellows and I don't want to be caught here."

There came another flash, that descended near the water. The crashing noise of the thunder came at the same instant.

Fred, facing the tent, saw the bolt strike the ridge pole. Evidently the current ran down one of the poles, for he saw the bluish white electric fluid running over the ground, coming from inside the tent. The tent sagged, then fell.

"Gracious!" shivered this evil traveler of

the night. "It will be a wonder if that bolt didn't stretch them all out. I wonder if it killed Dick Prescott and his crowd?"

Uncontrollable curiosity seized upon Fred. Turning about he ran toward the tent. Violently he tugged at the canvas. As he lifted it another sharp flash showed him the six Gridley High School boys lying motionless in a row.

"The lightning did finish them!" gasped young Ripley, overcome with fright and awe.

CHAPTER XXII

FRED IS GRATEFUL—ONE SECOND!

FOR some moments Fred Ripley stood there, spellbound, regarding the still figures of Dick & Co. with fascinated fear.

Most of the time he stood in darkness, but as the flashes of lightning came he again saw the six motionless figures. Even the fearful crashes of thunder failed to arouse the sleepers.

"Oh, this is grewsome!" gasped Ripley at last, the coward in him coming to the surface strongly. "I can't stand this any longer!"

Unconsciously he spoke aloud, his voice rising to a wail. Then as he let the folds of canvas fall, a voice inside called angrily:

"Quit that! I want to get out."

It was Dave Darrin's voice, and Dave was the quickest-tempered one of the six boys.

Fred knew that it behooved him to get away from the spot at once. There was a wriggling under the canvas. Ripley turned to flee.

Gr-r-r-r! Towser stood barring his path.

"Hurry up, Darrin!" appealed Fred, as Towser moved closer, showing his teeth. "Hurry! Or this dog will chew me up."

"Who's there?" called Darrin, thrusting his head out of the collapsed tent, then drawing the rest of his body after.

Another flash of lightning showed Ripley's frightened face.

"Oh, you, is it?" uttered Dave in a tone full of scorn.

"Hurry and quiet this bull-dog!" the lawyer's son insisted.

"Don't worry," retorted Darrin calmly. "Towser wouldn't sink his teeth very deep in you! He's a self-respecting dog."

Now that one of the members of the canoe club was on the spot, the bull pup displayed less ferocity. He contented himself with eyeing Fred, ready to spring at a second's notice.

"What has happened?" demanded Dave, looking rather bewilderedly at the tent.

"Your shack was struck by lightning," Fred answered glibly, and then, ever ready to lie, he added, "I was passing by in the car, in a hurry to get back to the hotel, and I saw the thing happen. The lightning ran along the ridge-pole, then down into the tent and out at the sides along the ground. I'm afraid some of your fellows have been struck. At first I thought all of you had been killed, so I ran down here to investigate."

But Dave paid little heed to the last part

of this statement. He had seized hold of one side of the canvas, holding it up.

"Dick!" he called lustily. "Tom, Greg, Dan, Harry!"

There was no response. The thunder continued to boom louder than ever.

"Hold this canvas up," Dave Darrin ordered sharply, and Ripley, knowing that Towser was eyeing him, obeyed. Inside crawled Darrin, shaking each of his friends in turn and calling to them.

"I can't wake 'em! I can't get 'em to speak," reported Darrin, crawling out again, his face white with anguish. "I'm afraid they've been——"

"Yes," nodded Ripley, in a hoarse voice. "They're dead!"

"How did you say you got here?" demanded Dave suddenly. "In a car?"

"Yes."

"Then we'll prop the canvas up to let air inside the tent, and then you'll drive me to the Hotel Pleasant as fast as you can go!"

"Maybe I won't," jeered Fred.

"Maybe you will," retorted Dave Darrin indignantly. His voice rang with righteous contempt. "Either you'll stand by at a time like this, or I'll fall upon you tooth and nail—with the very able help of the dog!"

Gr-r-r-r! approved Towser, again showing his teeth.

"I—I'll take you!" quavered Ripley.

"Of course you will," nodded Darrin. "Wait till I see if the lantern is all right."

He crawled into the tent, found the lantern and struck a match. Curiously enough the lantern had not been injured. Placing the lantern outside, Darrin sharply commanded his chance companion to aid in propping the canvas so that those underneath could get air.

"Now, come along," ordered Darrin, when this had been done. "Towser, watch the—the gentleman!"

Thus they started up the slope, when they heard a growl just ahead of them. In the same instant Towser, uttering a yelp, turned and darted away as fast as he could go.

"Now, we'll see whether you'll boss me," grunted Fred Ripley, branishing the club that he held in his left hand. "Your dog is no good any more."

"Neither will you or I be any good any more if we don't keep our nerve," uttered Darrin quietly, as he turned the lantern's rays against the object in their path. "There's only one thing in the world Towser would run away from, and that's just what is ahead of us—a mad dog!"

At this instant Fred, too, caught sight of the object in their path. A large dog, of doubtful breed, stood before them, its head down, but its bloodshot eyes watching them cunningly. It's dripping jaws carried conviction that the animal was rabid.

Fred did not cry out or stir. He was too frightened to do either. But Dave very stealthily put down the lantern. Then, his muscles wholly steady, he snatched up an eight-foot pole that lay on the ground.

"Now, come on, you beast!" challenged Darrin, making a slight thrust with the pole.

Enraged at the challenge, the rabid dog sprang forward, its mouth wide open. Without faltering, Dave made a thrust that jammed the pole hard into the animal's mouth.

Staggered by the blow, the dog fell back on its side. It never rose again, for now Darrin used the pole as a club, raining down blows upon the dangerous animal until he was sure that there was no life left in it.

"Darrin, that was wonderful nerve of yours!" gasped Fred with admiration wrung from him in spite of himself. "And you saved my life!"

"I wasn't thinking of that," said Dave grimly, as he picked up the lantern. "Don't you believe I'll ever brag about having saved your life. Now to the car, and be quick."

Fred, stung by the contemptuous answer, felt his resentment raging. He darted forward so swiftly that he might have been able to leap into the car and get away with it, had not something else happened.

For Towser, though he had run away from a rabid specimen of his own species, had circled about. Now he leaped into the automobile, growling, just as Fred would have sprung in.

"That's right, Towser. Hold the sneak!" called Dave, arriving on a run and leaping into the car. "Now, Ripley, hang you, do some quick and honest work!"

"Kick that dog out of the car first," pleaded Fred.

"I won't," Darrin retorted. "The dog is my guarantee for your good behavior to-night."

As soon as might be they ran around the lower end of the lake, then raced for the hotel.

There Dr. Bentley was aroused. While he was dressing he sent a bell-boy to order his own big car.

Just when Ripley vanished from the scene no one about the grounds or the hotel seemed to know or care.

Dr. Bentley, dressed in record time, came down.

"Now, we'll drive fast, Darrin," the doctor announced, as he dropped his bag into the car

and seated himself at the wheel. "Struck by lightning, did you say? It was a fearful storm, but it is stopping now."

Ere they reached the camp the stars were out. There was no sign of nature's dangerous mood.

Dr. Bentley first of all ordered that the canvas be lifted and cast aside. The tent was badly wrecked and burned, though the rain had prevented the rising of flames that might have burned the bodies of the five unconscious boys.

"Throw your coat off, Darrin, and do the work of four men for a few minutes," said Dr. Bentley tersely.

"I'll do the work of a hundred," replied Dave, "if I can find the way."

After some minutes of hard work Tom Reade opened his eyes. Shortly after this the puffing of one of the hotel launches was heard. For the doctor, while hurrying into his clothes, had left word with Mrs. Bentley what to do. The launch brought another and much larger tent, with cots, bedding and other things, as well as four capable workmen.

Greg came to next. Neither he nor Reade, however, were good for much at the time. By the time that the new tent was up, and the cots arranged those who were still unconscious were carried in there. Then Greg and Tom were helped into the drier quarters.

It was Dick who longest resisted the efforts to bring him to consciousness. At last, however, he opened his eyes.

"It was a mercy that none of you were killed," uttered Dr. Bentley devoutly. "A little bit more of the current and you might have been done for."

But now that he had attended to his young friends, Dr. Bentley did not think of returning to the hotel. He remained through the night, despite the fact that his charges became steadily stronger and at last went sound asleep.

In the morning, before eight o'clock, the launch was over again on that side of the lake. This time it brought Mrs. Bentley, Mrs. Meade and the girls, as well as a lot of daintily prepared food fresh from the hotel kitchen.

"This is a mighty pleasant world!" sighed Dick Prescott, full of luxurious content.

"Yes when you have some good friends in the same world with you," Tom added.

Dave and Dan slipped away to remove the body of the rabid dog killed during the night.

The tent they had brought with them from Gridley would never be of service again, so Dick & Co. were highly delighted when informed that Manager Wright begged them to accept the use of this larger, finer tent, and also of the cots, during their stay at the lake.

CHAPTER XXIII

TRENTVILLE, THE AWESOME

AS the "Scalp-hunter" swung around the upper buoy and headed down the course she had a lead of a clean two lengths over the Trentville High School canoe.

There was a larger crowd on the lake to-day and more steam and gasoline craft were out.

As Dick & Co. shot down the line, still leading, steam and pneumatic whistles broke forth into a noisy din.

Over on the western shore, on the grounds of the larger hotel, only one little knot of Gridley people stood to watch and cheer. These were the Bentleys, Mrs. Meade and the same group of girls that had watched the other race.

No excursion had come up from the home town to-day, for no one in Gridley had believed that their high school youngsters could defeat the seasoned Trentville High School canoe crew.

Only two days before Trentville had won from Preston High School by nearly five lengths.

What show was there for Dick & Co. or for Gridley High School?

Hence the smallness of the Gridley crowd present.

However, some hundreds of people who looked on were eager only to see the best crew win, as they had no ties binding them either to Gridley or to Trentville.

But the unexpected had happened.

In the first place, when the Trentville canoe and crew arrived at the lake Dick Prescott had insisted that Preston High School and Trentville High School race together first.

Thus he had opportunity to watch the Trentville work. Moreover, by delaying his own race against Trentville, Dick had had more time to train and drill his crew into form, both as to paddling and endurance.

He had profited well by these opportunities.

To-day, from the outset, he had handled his crew so that a slight lead over Trentville had been maintained. This had been gradually increased, and now that the buoy had been turned with such a handsome lead, none on shore or in the other boats believed that Trentville High School had any further chance.

Pascal, however, who captained the Trentville canoe, had another view of the matter. It was Ted Pascal's third summer in a canoe. He had drilled more than one crew, and knew all the ins and outs of the sport.

"I guess Prescott thinks he has the whole thing, by this time," smiled Pascal to himself. "Poor chap. He's a nice young freshman, and I hate to fool him. But we'll soon begin our work. The Gridley crew must be well tired by now."

Presently Ted Pascal passed the word quietly over the heads of his perspiring but confident crew.

"Tighten up a little bit, now—a little bit at a time," was the message Pascal gave his followers.

By the time that the home course had been half covered it was noted that the "Slip-over," as the Trentville craft was named, was creeping up fast on its rival.

Dick, too, quickly became aware of this.

"Trentville is showing a lot of new form, fellows, and coming right up on us," Dick called quietly. "This race isn't won! In fact, we're near to losing it. Form! form! muscle! Don't fumble again, Hazelton! One, two, three, four!"

But still the Trentville High School craft continued to creep up on them. The Gridley High School girls on shore became so anxious that they forgot to wave their handkerchiefs and cheer.

"More push! Power, as well as speed," Dick

panted, for now the grueling speed was beginning to tell on even the leader of Dick & Co.

The prow of the "Slip-over" now passed the stern of the "Scalp-hunter." Reade saw this, too, and uttered a groan.

From the shore and the boats holding spectators came new volleys of cheers, for most of these spectators were wholly impartial, and wanted only to see an exciting race.

"Let yourself out, Gridley!" boomed a voice over the water.

Dick and Co. were doing their best—or what amounted to much the same thing—believed that they were, at any rate.

Yet the Trentville canoe crept steadily up, then led by a quarter length, a half length. It looked as though the Trentville crew would soon be a length ahead of the Gridley boys.

Everyone of Dick's chums was desperate. So was Dick himself, but he kept as cool as possible.

"Bring our prow up!" he called steadily. "No matter what happens, bring our prow up flush with Trentville!"

By some miracle the Gridley boys found strength enough left in their arms and backs to accomplish this feat.

Then the "Scalp-hunter" dropped behind again, an inch at a time.

"We caught 'em once!" called Dick in an even voice. "We must do it again. One, two, three, four! Hump! hump! Put in the power!"

By inches the "Scalp-hunter" crawled up, but Dick & Co. felt completely exhausted.

"You've been doing well, kid," called the even voice of Ted Pascal over the water, "but you can't do any more. We take this race!"

"Do you?" dared Dick.

"Yes; you're all in, and we have reserve steam left."

"Have you?" snapped young Prescott. "Then now is the time to prove it."

Taking a deep breath, Dick Prescott shouted:

"Remember what Gridley demands! No defeats. Dash ahead, Gridleys! Now—go in and kill yourselves for the honor of your school!"

Dick was far from meaning that literally, but his quick eye had measured the remaining distance of the course.

He was captain enough to know just what each of his men could endure, and for how long they could stand up under it.

"Life is of little use to the vanquished!" Dick shouted on. "Go in to win—kill yourselves!"

At an earlier point on the course it would have been fearfully bad leadership. It would have resulted in disaster had any of Dick & Co. had any form of serious physical weakness.

But Dick Prescott knew his boys!

"Kill yourselves!" he shouted out again, as he saw the two canoes running neck and neck. "For the honor of Gridley High School!"

Right noble was the response, though flesh and blood could not stand this new and savage grilling for long.

"Wake up, Trentville!" shouted Ted Pascal, when he saw the "Scalp-hunter" gaining. "Wake up! Let out all of your steam! Push!"

Dick Prescott said no more. His straining gaze was now fixed on the finish line. Not one of his chums even glanced at the imaginary line. All their thoughts, like all their glances, were on their paddles.

"A final dash, now!" called Dick. "Slam up the pace for Gridley!"

But Trentville was showing its boasted reserve steam.

Close as they now were to the finish, Pascal had no thought of permitting defeat to come to his crew.

No dinning of whistles was there now. Every spectator waited breathlessly for the outcome that would be reached in the next few seconds.

CHAPTER XXIV

CONCLUSION

THEN the end came.

Pascal sank back on his seat with a groan when he had put in the last dip of his paddle that could do any good.

Frantic indeed was the cheering, and now once more came the deafening screech of whistles.

From the judges' launch, as soon as the din had died down a bit, came the announcement through a megaphone:

"Gridley High School wins by three quarters of a length."

Dick heard the news, then ordered quietly:

"Paddle—easily."

A turn of his own blade swung the prow around so that the "Scalp-hunter" glided in toward the hotel landing float.

To-day he had no jubilant mob of Gridleyites to fear in the excess of their joy. Only some very gentle friends of their own town came hurrying forward to congratulate them.

But Dr. Bentley gripped Dick's arm as soon as that young man stepped from the canoe.

"[illegible] your crew along and follow me, Pres-

cott," whispered the physician. "You are a limp-looking lot. That was a wild, splendid finish, but I fear you may have put it too hard to your crew. I want to examine you all, to make sure that not too much harm has been done by your desperate 'kill yourself' order."

Dr. Bentley led the way to the boathouse, while a hotel employé took charge of the "Scalp-hunter."

He listened briefly at each boy's heart, then made them all sit still for ten minutes. At the end of that time he examined them again as to heart beat. Half an hour later he made a third examination.

"I don't believe anyone of you has sustained any lasting injury," said Dr. Bentley at last. "But, Prescott, don't you ever dare give a 'kill yourself' order again. That is my order, and an emphatic one. You may recall that I happen to be medical director of the Gridley High School Athletic Association. If you youngsters ever try a pace like that again, then undoubtedly you will all be disqualified from future athletic events. Don't forget."

After that lecture Dick & Co. were allowed to sponge with hot water, rub down and put on ordinary clothing. Then they went forth to meet their friends.

Ted Pascal, however, was the first to rush

forward. He had been waiting for their appearance.

"Prescott, you're a great fellow as a crew captain!" the big chief of the Trentvilles declared. "I was sure we had you beaten, and even now I can't imagine how you left us to the rear. But it was a great race, and I congratulate you!"

"And we all thank you for your good will," Dick answered promptly. "Truth to tell, Pascal, I thought, too, that you almost had us beaten."

"Almost?" echoed Ted. "Why not wholly?"

"Because Gridley is never quite beaten. It's our way, you know—one that was adopted by a past generation of Gridley boys and has been lived up to ever since."

"I've heard a lot about that 'Gridley way,'" laughed Ted Pascal, "but to-day was the first time that I've ever had it played on me."

"Do you play football?" asked Dick.

"No."

"Baseball?"

"I tried, but couldn't make the nine," Pascal confessed.

"Then I don't know that you're likely to have the 'Gridley' way played upon you again—not unless you meet some of our girls in a tennis game."

The two crews mingled, passing some ten minutes in talk and in good-humored chaff. But at last Dick broke away and drew out from the canoe talk as he saw Laura, Belle, Susie and the other girls awaiting them at a point farther up in the hotel grounds.

"I know the girls have been waiting to speak to us," Dick told his chums, "and they've been mighty kind to us. Come along."

"We thought you would never get around to talking with poor mortals like us," Laura admitted, as the boys joined the high school girls.

"It was mainly your father's fault," Dick laughingly protested.

"How was that?"

"You'll have to ask him. Perhaps we're not at liberty to reveal what the Athletic Association's medical director had to say to us."

"Especially when it's in the nature of a 'roast,'" added Danny Grin.

"If my father was severe with any of you I am certain that he had good reason," replied Laura gravely, though her eyes twinkled. "But what a splendid race you made against Trentville. And at one time we felt sure that you were beaten."

"We all felt the same way at one time," Tom Reade interjected.

"All except Dick," added Darry. "Why, if anyone were to kill Dick Prescott, Dick would insist on the fellow coming around the next day and proving his death."

"It was a splendid race, anyway," Belle glowed. "Do you notice anything, boys?"

"Where?" asked Tom, looking blankly around.

"Anything about us?" Susie put in.

"Nothing," drawled Tom, "except that you're the finest, daintiest and sweetest-looking lot of girls we know. But that's true every other day in the week."

"We didn't ask you anything like that," Susie pouted, "though doubtless it's all true enough. But don't you notice what we're all wearing?"

"I think I see what you mean," Greg suggested hopefully. "Each one of you is wearing the Gridley High School pin."

"Correct!" assented Susie warmly. "But can't you guess why we're wearing the pins? It's because when Gridley boys can win such a race as you won to-day it's a real honor to wear the pin."

"And a bigger honor to have it worn on our account," Dick laughed.

"I was waiting to see who would be the first boy to say something really nice!" cried Clara Marshall.

"Have you heard of any more canoe clubs coming this way—high school clubs with which you could arrange races?" asked Laura.

"No," said Dick, with a shake of his head. "Even if there were a dozen coming here I'm afraid we'd have to lose the chance."

"Why?" asked Belle quickly.

"Because we can remain here only two or three days longer."

"Oh, that's a shame," broke in Susie. "Do you really have to go back to Gridley?"

"Yes," said Dick solemnly.

"Is the reason one that you may properly tell us?" Laura inquired.

"It's one that we're not ashamed of, because we can't help it," Prescott rejoined. "Our vacation up here is nearly at an end just because our funds are in the same plight—nearly at an end, you see."

"Oh, what a shame!" cried Clara sympathetically.

"To be short of money is more than a shame," blurted Tom Reade. "It is a crime, or ought to be. No one has any right to be poor—but what can we do?"

"Oh, well, there are plenty of pleasant times to be had in good old Gridley in the summer time," Dick declared stoutly. "And we shall have our canoe there."

While chatting the young people had been walking up through the hotel grounds until now they stood just behind the stone wall that separated the ground from the road.

"Why—look what's coming!" urged Dave Darrin, in a voice expressive of mock interest.

All looked, of course.

Fred Ripley, his hat drawn down over his eyes, came trudging along.

In one hand he carried a dress suit case, and from the way his shoulder sagged on that side, the case appeared to be heavy.

On young Ripley's face was a deep scowl.

"Judging from his appearance," suggested Tom Reade, "Rip is walking all the way to the Land of Sweet Tempers. Probably he's doing it on a wager, and is just beginning to realize what a long road lies ahead of him. I wonder if he'll arrive at his destination during his lifetime?"

Fred's shoes, usually so highly polished, were already thick with dust. His collar, ordinarily stiff and immaculate, was sadly wilted and wrinkled. His whole air was one of mingled dejection and rage.

"I wonder what can have happened to him?" asked Susie curiously.

"I think his conscience may be chasing him," smiled Dick.

What really had happened was that Squire Ripley had been present when his son had made a very disrespectful answer to a white-haired man, one of the guests at the Lakeview House where the Ripleys were stopping.

In a great rage the lawyer had decided to send his son home for that act of gross disrespect to the aged.

To make the punishment more complete, Mr. Ripley had ordered his son to make the long journey on foot over the hills to the railway station. Only enough money had been handed the young man to buy his railway ticket home. The dress suit case had been added in order to make his progress more difficult.

"A young man who cannot treat the aged with proper respect must be dealt with severely," said Lawyer Ripley to his son. "You will reach home fagged out from your long tramp. For your fare, until your mother and I return, you will have to depend on such food as the servants at home can spare you from their larder. Don't you dare order anything from the stores to be charged against me. Now, go home, drowse out your summer in the hot town and reflect on what a mean cad you have shown yourself to be to-day."

While Fred was thinking this all over he glanced up suddenly, to see fourteen pairs of

Gridley eyes fixed upon him. The young people, as soon as they found themselves observed, immediately turned their glances away from the sullen looking young pedestrian from their school.

"I wonder what has happened to Fred Ripley?" Susie repeated, when the object of their remark was some distance away. "Something has gone very wrong with him. A blind man could see that much."

During this time Fred was thinking to himself:

"If the guv'nor subjects me to this degradation just for one sharp answer to an old man, what would that same guv'nor do to me if he knew all the things that I've been engaged in up here at the lake? What if he knew that I hired that farmer's son to swim under the float and attach that drag to the canoe? What would the guv'nor do if he knew that I tried to wreck Prescott's outfit?"

Fred shivered at the mental prospect of his father's stern, grim wrath.

But young Ripley, as sometimes happens, wasn't caught just then. He would go on for the present planning mean tricks against those whom he had no just reason to dislike. Yet his time was sure to come.

Soon after Dick & Co. were compelled to bid

adieu to Lake Pleasant. They had had a splendid time, and had acquitted themselves with great credit in this entry into high school athletics. They had had pleasure enough to last them all the rest of the summer in memory.

The cost of transporting their canoe, on the homeward trip, was borne out of the funds of the Gridley High School Athletic Council.

Dick & Co. entered three more canoe races against high school teams that summer. All these were run off on the home river, and Dick & Co. had the great glory of winning them all —"the Gridley way."

After the summer, came the opening of the school year again. Our readers may learn what happened to Dick & Co. in their sophomore year in the second volume of the "High School Boys Series," which is published under the title, "The High School Pitcher; Or, Dick & Co. on the Gridley Diamond."

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